Freedom of Expression, Democratic Discourse and the Social Media

Editors

Maria Elliot and Kristoffer Holt

COGITATIO

Table of Contents

Editorial

Editorial: Freedom of Expression and the Online Abyss

Maria Elliot and Kristoffer Holt *

Department of Media and Journalism, Linnaeus University, 391 82 Kalmar, Sweden; E-Mails: maria.elliot@lnu.se (M.E.), kristoffer.holt@lnu.se (K.H.)

* Corresponding author

Abstract
This introduction to the thematic issue *Freedom of Expression, Democratic Discourse and the Social Media* discusses the state of the debate surrounding freedom of expression in the field of communication studies and presents four original articles dealing with freedom of speech in contemporary media from different perspectives.

Keywords
democratic discourse; freedom of expression; social media

Pivotal throughout the history of thought leading up to the liberal modern construals of freedom of expression, was always the notion of man's potential for self-abstraction and self-control in the face of offensive content, vulgarity, repulsiveness, evil, and blasphemy (Peters, 2005). The justification for tolerating such things was always that debate about what is best for the common good would suffer if all perspectives were not given voice. According to Peters, such classical, "heard-hearted" liberalism is becoming increasingly difficult to champion in times of increased globalization, cultural pluralism, and postmodern uncertainty. The dilemma of our times is to find a way to reconcile "critical liberty and orthodox faith under postmodern conditions" (Peters, 2005, p. 292). The Mohammad cartoon crisis in 2005 (where caricatures of the prophet Muhammad were published in the Danish daily *Jyllands-Posten* and caused worldwide protests, resulting in numerous deaths) became a gruesome illustration of Peter's point. Since then, the issue of freedom of expression has continued to be intensely problematized.

With the advent of social media, the very conditions for democratic discourse changed in several ways. New forums for political debate have evolved, forums that are governed by different norms and rules than those of the pre-digital media world. Even though the possibility for the public to actively partake in the public debate has increased significantly (Neubaum & Krämer, 2017), actual participation still tends to be limited to certain groups and factions. The discourse of social media is governed by a logic of its own, different from the logic that we know from traditional media. However, the ramifications of this are not restricted to the online world—they spill over on traditional media, for instance through the dissemination of false stories or when overinflated storms of opinion get turned into regular news. Furthermore, this is taking place in a social and political context that in many Western societies is undergoing an increasing political and cultural polarization which is picked up by different groups on social media where it gets amplified and sometimes distorted. This interaction between traditional democratic discourse, social media, and the political climate has altered the conditions for expressing different opinions and ideas in the public sphere. This discussion is, however, not only held in relation to various online excesses (Ng, 2020) but also in connection with offline settings: Cancel culture, no-platforming, and violent protests surrounding controversial speakers have become a recurring phenomenon at universities and deliberative spaces worldwide (Norris, 2020). Such conflicts

are emblematic of the culture-war-character of today's public discourse.

Amidst online disinformation, alternative news providers, and information warfare, legislators are seemingly at loss over how to handle the situation. We see attempts from various governments attempting to tackle the challenge of disinformation and hateful content on the one hand (Germany making it unlawful to post hate speech in social media, and in France, where it is now illegal to publish 'fake news'), and examples of government initiatives which try to counter activist involvement in universities and the media, on the other hand (Poland and Hungary). The dilemma Peters wrote about in 2005 is even more real today and questions are hanging in the air that need to be addressed from a scholarly perspective. There seems to be a substantial unity, for example, among politicians, journalists, and researchers about the need to work actively against fake news and disinformation. But how will such initiatives materialize, and what implications will they have for the future? While there is a vigorous debate online about freedom of speech, the threat of cancel culture and woke activism on the one hand, and about hate speech, threats to journalists, scholars, and politicians on the other, media scholars tend to be rather absent in the discussion. This thematic issue has its genesis in discussions about these changing conditions, and the consequences these changes may have. The articles approach the problem of freedom of expression, democratic discourse, and social media from several different angles: Internet governance, populist Internet activism, online harassment, and cancel culture.

Digital media has brought about new conditions for public discourse, in particular platforms where users are able to remain anonymous. Examples abound of extremist propaganda, threats, and personal attacks. Legislators are asking for intervention by the social media companies, but seem to be reluctant to alter existing legal provisions for the freedom of expression. Ricknell (2020) explores the future of freedom of expression on the Internet by discussing different possible scenarios of Internet governance and their outcomes for democratic participation, digital surveillance, and free access to media content. She identifies three types of primary players: governments, private tech companies, and users. In her article, she discusses the consequences of each of these governing the Internet infrastructure and hence regulating the content on different platforms. She concludes that user governance, or *decentralization*, holds the most promising future for freedom of expression and democratic participation on the Internet, even if this scenario also has some pitfalls. She takes a more pessimistic view on the prospects for digital democracy if the Internet were governed by state regulation or by private tech companies. In these cases, censorship, Internet shutdowns, lack of transparency, and restrictions on public access to media could become an increasing problem, not only in countries with authoritarian regimes but also in those traditionally considered to be democratic.

Nevertheless, digital platforms still hold great potential as channels for oppositional political communication, even in countries where freedom of expression is curtailed. Glazunova (2020) illuminates this with her study of the Russian oppositional politician, Alexei Navalny, who uses social media as a channel to reach the public with his anti-corruption investigative journalism and populist message. Glazunova considers Navalny to be an exception in the political life of Russia today, a non-elected opposition activist who has not only survived in the political arena but also been successful at keeping in touch with the public in an oppressive political climate (the article was written before Navalny was poisoned in August 2020).

Public discourse in the media, both legacy media and digital platforms, can be a democratic resource, but it can also be turned into a force aimed at cancelling public figures. Latif (2020) looks into one example of cancel culture in the US in 2019 when an American Muslim scholar was included in a state commission under the Trump administration. Latif's analysis of opinion editorials that was published in the mainstream press as a response to this appointment shows that a substantial proportion of the editorials written by members of the Muslim community could be labelled as character cancellation. Latif also discusses the consequences of opting to be silent or absent on the digital platforms where much of the debate that followed took place.

The public sphere is not constituted by the news media alone. Other genres, like fiction, biographies, and essays, are also nurturing the democratic discourse as well as being dependent on a free and pluralistic public sphere. For this reason, Wegner, Prommer, and Seidel (2020) consider online harassment targeting non-journalist writers as just a serious threat to democratic discourse as harassment targeting journalists. In their study of German writers, Wegner et al. (2020) found that half of the respondents have personal experience of being harassed online. For many of these, the attacks have resulted in restrictions in their everyday working life in terms of different forms of self-restraint and even self-censorship. The authors point out that this could have severe consequences for the digital public sphere since they argue that unrestrained literary work is necessary for social inclusion, integration, and plurality.

While limited in scope, the articles in this thematic issue, each in their own way, provide relevant and original contributions to the ongoing debate. Ricknell (2020) provides a constructive framework that allows for a structured discussion of the possible scenarios. Glazunova's (2020) analysis of a Russian case is original since the current research trend within media and populism is to focus on the rise of populist politicians in democratic Western countries (Krämer & Holtz-Bacha, 2020). Glazunova's analysis shows that alternative media platforms can serve important political and ideological purposes in certain media landscapes, while at the same time being a channel for populist messages, targeting a

corrupt elite. Latif's (2020) contribution also addresses a complex and sensitive question from an unusual perspective for media scholars: What public positions are realistically available for Muslim intellectuals in America today? It describes the dynamics of cancel culture that should be taken more seriously by the community of media scholars. Wegner et al. (2020) emphasize the fact that it is not only journalists who are put in harm's way, the silencing of other voices is indeed a reality and is equally harmful and problematic.

As an area of interest to media scholars, issues such as these deserve further attention.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

Glazunova, S. (2020). 'Four populisms' of Alexey Navalny: An analysis of Russian non-systemic opposition discourse on YouTube. *Media and Communication*, *8*(4), 121–132.

Krämer, B., & Holtz-Bacha, C. (Eds.). (2020). Perspectives on populism and the media: Avenues for research (Vol. 7). Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag.

Latif, J. (2020). American Muslim character cancellation: Framing engagement through the sphere of deviance. *Media and Communication*, *8*(4), 133–144.

Neubaum, G., & Krämer, N. C. (2017). Opinion climates in social media: Blending mass and interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research*, *43*(4), 464–476. https://doi.org/10.1111/hcre.12118

Ng, E. (2020). No grand pronouncements here…: Reflections on cancel culture and digital media participation. *Television and New Media*, *21*(6), 621–627. https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476420918828

Norris, P. (2020). Closed minds? Is a 'cancel culture' stifling academic freedom and intellectual debate in political science? (Working Paper Series RWP20-025). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School.

Peters, J. D. (2005). Courting the abyss: Free speech and the liberal tradition. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Ricknell, E. (2020). Freedom of expression and alternatives for internet governance: Prospects and pitfalls. *Media and Communication*, *8*(4), 110–120.

Wegner, J., Prommer, E., & Seidel, C. C. (2020). Free speech under pressure: The effect of online harassment on literary writers. *Media and Communication*, *8*(4), 145–157.

About the Authors

Maria Elliot holds a PhD in Mass Communication and Journalism and is a Senior Lecturer in Media and Communication Studies and Journalism Studies at the Department of Media and Journalism, Linnaeus University, Kalmar, Sweden. Elliot's main research areas are public confidence in the news media and digital news consumption.

Kristoffer Holt is Associate Professor at the Department of Media and Journalism, Linnaeus University, Kalmar, Sweden. Holt has done research and published about topics related to media as a platform for public discourse. His publications have dealt with alternative media, media criticism, media ethics, citizen and participatory journalism, and media and religion, among other topics. His work has appeared in *Digital Journalism*, *New Media & Society*, *European Journal of Communication*, *Information, Communication & Society*, *Journalism Practice*, and *Javnost: The Public Media and Communication*, among others. The title of his latest book is *Right-Wing Alternative Media* (2019, Routledge).

Article

Freedom of Expression and Alternatives for Internet Governance: Prospects and Pitfalls

Emma Ricknell

Department of Political Science, Linnaeus University, 351 95 Växjö, Sweden; E-Mail: emma.ricknell@lnu.se

Abstract
This article dives into the ongoing debate on how to address concerns of personal safety and respect online, as well as consequences for exposure to polarizing and in various ways harmful information, while at the same time safeguarding the democratic essentials of freedom of expression and participation. It does so by examining the issue from a less common angle, namely who governs the Internet and the platforms where much of the toxic material appears. By applying a model of free speech regulation conceptualized by legal scholar Jack Balkin (2018a, 2018b), the article explores different theoretical future scenarios of Internet governance involving three main players, namely governments, private companies, and speakers. The analysis finds that depending on which player is at the forefront, the outcomes from the standpoint of participation and freedom of speech may be drastically different. While there is potential for transformation that can enable more ownership, transparency, and agency for citizens and news media, some potential paths will place ever-increasing control over the interests of users.

1. Introduction

For those who remember the dawn of the modern Internet, the sense of unlimited possibilities may be reminiscent. Not only did we gain access to information in a completely different way at the touch of a mouse button, but could connect with people in previously unthinkable ways. With the Internet decentralizing communication, putting new forms of speech and cultural expressions into the hands of participants, a radical enhancement of democracy was seen as a possibility (Poster, 1997). Over time, the Internet via social media platforms indeed grew into an important new tool in citizen struggles for freedom and democracy (Chadwick & Howard, 2009), such as during the Arab Spring in 2011 (Allagui, 2014).

Our modern Internet however also features aspects that fit poorly with the idea of participation in a furtherance of democracy on equal grounds. There is considerable research on the prevalence of harmful, polarizing content online (e.g., Assimakopoulos, Baider, & Millar, 2017; Harmer & Lumdsen, 2019; Keipi, Näsi, Oksanen, & Räsänen, 2017), content which may have an effect on how targeted groups participate online, potentially silencing them altogether (van der Wilk, 2018). Online arenas where users can remain anonymous have been particularly highlighted, as they can provide breeding ground for extreme forms of online communication and sharing of very offensive information (Blumler, 2015).

Calls for regulation or even removal of such content online are frequent. The question is, how? Governments are not able to surveil all online communication and instantly block or remove harmful content (DeNardis, 2020). Moderation of content is not an easy task, involving a number of complex decisions and interpretations regarding, for example, original intent of the content, how it fits within the boundaries of current cultural taste, and public discourse in a situation where multiple competing value systems exist at the same time

(Gillespie, 2018). In other words, rules for what is acceptable speech and how to establish rules that can meet the needs of very large and diverse groups of users is not only difficult, but inevitably political (Suzor, 2020). However, the platforms are not democratically elected public entities. Nevertheless, governments can delegate the task of regulation to such private entities (Arpagian, 2016; Coche, 2018; DeNardis, 2020). There may be multiple reasons for such public-private collaborations, including aspects of national security, where actions taken after the 9/11 terror attacks in the U.S. constitute an early example (Birnhack & Elkin-Koren, 2003). This development arguably reached new heights in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic and the World Health Organization's declaration of an on-going "infodemic" (World Health Organization, 2020). Multiple platforms, following the wishes of governments, during this time began to actively censor harmful information relating to the virus (Goldsmith & Woods, 2020). The most dominating method is however a form of 'self-regulation,' whereby social platforms by virtue of not being liable for its content exist in a fairly laissez-faire relationship with governments (Gorwa, 2019b; Klonick, 2018). Still, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in various ways regulate content today (Gorwa, 2019b; Kaye, 2019; Ullman & Tomalin, 2019), and this type of intervention of selection and deletion of content occurs constantly, even though most users never come in direct contact with it (Gillespie, 2015).

This expanding aspect of control over content however actualizes the idea of unintended consequences. In the worst-case scenario, the incredibly powerful technologies that have enabled us freedom are the very same that authoritarian regimes can obtain control over and use for repression (DeNardis, 2014, 2020; York & Zuckerman, 2019). Alternatively, if the private companies that already function as gatekeepers for online content as exemplified above increasingly take ownership of fundamental aspects of the Internet's infrastructures, it in turn raises questions regarding transparency and concentration of power by entities not elected by democratic means (Nothias, 2020). Control of the underlying infrastructure that enables online content, generated by everyone from individual users to journalists to public agencies as part of democratic discourse, can thus have far-reaching effects on the ability to speak freely.

This article departs from a perspective that once focus expands from content to who has the power to regulate it, a defining feature of the digital age appears: the friction present between freedom of speech and infrastructure (Balkin, 2014). It also applies an understanding that significant technological advancements in the near future can tip the current development towards a version involving private enterprise domination in cooperation with governments, or one where information is seen as an essential service and is governed by representative institutions, or possibly directly by citizens (Mosco, 2016). Considering how it remains very unclear

as to what the preferable balance in terms of responsibility should be between tech companies, governments, and users in a policy arena that has aptly been labelled as "fragmented" (Gorwa, 2019b, p. 855), emphasis is here on possibilities, not making determinations. This article thus aims to explore these trajectories, with focus upon consequences for accessibility and freedom of expression. It does so by discussing contemporary developments specific to each of the three main players involved, meaning governments, private companies, and users, seen through the lens of legal scholar Jack Balkin's model of free speech as a triangle (Balkin, 2018a, 2018b). Depending on which player takes the lead in governing the Internet, I argue that outcomes for a free and fair Internet may diverge drastically.

2. Internet Governance and Freedom of Speech

A perspective based on who governs the Internet falls under the broad concept of 'Internet governance,' an understudied area of research (DeNardis, 2020) that involves the "design and administration of the technical infrastructure necessary to keep the Internet operational and the enactment of substantive policies around these technologies" (DeNardis, 2014, p. 6). The technical architecture involves a number of protocols, standards, and systems, vital yet hardly discernable to the average Internet user, reflective of a number of not only scientific advancements but "social considerations of power and authority" (DeNardis, 2014, p. 8). This article focuses less on the technical aspects but instead on one specific theme within the area of Internet governance, namely how it functions as a proxy for content control (DeNardis, 2014). Importantly, the concept of 'governance' comprises both that of governments and private intermediaries.

Scholarly discussions regarding aspects of Internet infrastructure, privacy, and speech regulation appeared among legal scholars during the dramatic growth of the public Internet in the 1990s. Among those raising warning flags were Lawrence Lessig (1998, p. 3), who claimed that cyberspace "has the potential to be the antithesis of a space of freedom." While not everyone agreed (Sunstein, 1995), Lessig (2000) introduced the concept of 'code is law,' which not only highlighted the underlying politics of the decisions made regarding infrastructure of the Internet and the potential for governmental restrictions on free speech via new technology, but also that there were other interests involved, namely private.

Jack Balkin similarly at an early stage identified potential issues regarding freedom of expression and the infrastructure of the Internet. In 2004, he argued that the preservation of freedom of speech would be dependent on the design of the technological infrastructure, and that in fact, the digital age would alter the entire meaning of freedom of expression (Balkin, 2004). A decade later, Balkin (2014) claimed that the infrastructure of the online platforms had over time begun to merge with the

infrastructure of speech regulation as well as with that of public and private surveillance, altering participation in the new public sphere altogether.

3. Free Speech in the Digital World

The analytical framework used in this article relies on Balkin's above notion on participation in the contemporary digital world, and applies his model of free speech as a triangle per Figure 1 below (Balkin, 2018a, 2018b). In essence, the model builds upon an idea of a previous dualist model of free speech having developed into a pluralist. Dualist in the sense that before the advent of the Internet, there were two main players, namely governments, or nation-states, and speakers. The former regulated all types of speakers, which included everything from citizens to mass media. Discussions on the concept of free expression, as well as possible dangers to free expression, that were held during the 1800s and 1900s, typically centered upon if nation-states would censor its citizens (Balkin, 2018b). The pluralist model in contrast involves multiple players, but at least three primary ones: nation-states and supra-national entities such as the European Union, private enterprises that maintain the digital infrastructure, particularly search engines and social media platforms, and finally speakers who in different ways use digital infrastructure in order to communicate. The addition of the third player, private enterprises, has over time made the dualist model less applicable, meaning that the ability for free expression in the current time period is affected by power struggles between these three main players (Balkin, 2018b).

Fundamentally, Balkin (2018a, 2018b) sees three main problems with the formation of the triangle: the risk of censorship, lack of due process and transparency,

and digital surveillance. The development of these problems can be illustrated by using one type of potentially harmful online content, namely false stories portrayed as news circulating online, commonly known as 'fake news,' a term actualized particularly after the 2016 U.S. election (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Concerns over fake content can be raised from all three corners of the triangle, yet when it comes to tackling it, the range of agency varies greatly. If the content does not explicitly violate the law, government actors in democratic nations do not typically seek out and reprimand or restrict individuals who are either producing and/or sharing it at a systematic level. Anonymity also complicates efforts. Neither do private citizens directly block the ability of others to partake in such behavior on social media platforms; complaints and reporting disturbing content are the primary measures. Instead, agency lies with the owners of the digital infrastructure, meaning the tech companies. In the case of a social media platform, violations against community standards can be cause for content being removed, or users being restricted. There are many reasons why a platform would make such a decisions, including generally wanting users to feel happy and safe, and remain on the platform. Motivated by profit, private companies will indeed inevitably delimit and restrain participation in some way (Andersson Schwarz, 2017). Another reason is to appease one of the other players, namely governments (Balkin, 2018a).

While governments may not immediately threaten a social media platform for allowing fake news, governments can persuade and in other ways cajole a company into regulating speech. Even in a situation where the tech company applies a very high bar for regulating content, if profit is more stable by cooperating with gov-
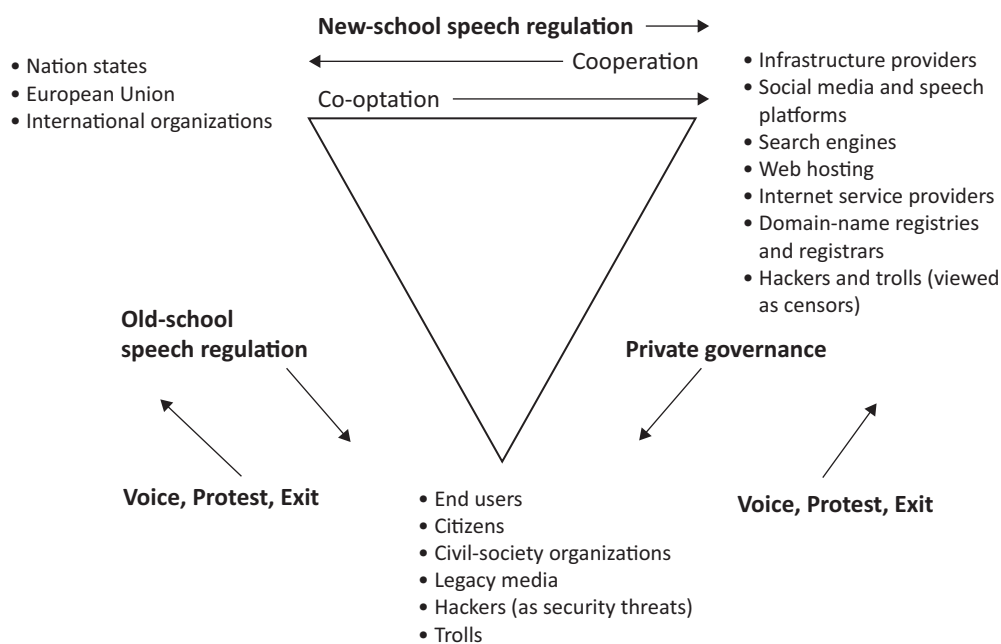
Figure 1. Balkin's (2018b) pluralist model of speech regulation.

ernments, measures might be taken to block users or remove content (Balkin, 2018b). The bigger the company, the more capabilities it may have to regulate speech, and thus a back-and-forth cooperation/co-optation between the two players develops which Balkin (2018a, p. 1153) calls "new-school speech regulation." It can be contrasted with its "old-school" version, meaning regulation that is primarily directed toward speakers by governments, still an active feature today (Balkin, 2018b).

New-school speech regulation under the above circumstances leads to the three main issues identified by Balkin (2018a, 2018b). First of all, if told to censor or block by government, companies will tend to err on the side of caution. This can lead to overblocking or over-filtering of content, or even censorship, with tech companies incentivized more by avoiding discussions with government regarding liability concerns for content on their platform than restricting a very limited number of users (Balkin, 2018a, 2018b). The use of algorithms to moderate content has also been found to result in unfair censorship, when far too much content is removed (Kaye, 2019).

Secondly, the process of blocking or removal, whether done before or after content such as fake news materializes online, is not the result of trying the matter in a judicial process, during which for example, a determination is made regarding whether the expressed speech was protected or unprotected by law. This particular aspect is instead one where the private company has tremendous power, governing in what can be described as a "lawless" way (Suzor, 2020, p. 6). Thus, while the platforms might act upon pressure from democratically elected governments, they have in this system developed a form of privatized government, void of accountability towards users. In essence, platforms can be dubbed our 'New Governors' (Klonick, 2018).

Finally, in order to locate and track users who for example produce and/or share fake news, tech companies benefit from knowing as much as possible about them. Such capability has since long been expanding, based upon the need to be able to convince advertisers of maximum exposure to possible customers. The more an operators' infrastructure expands, the greater the capability to collect user data will be, and in turn, the greater role such companies can play in new-school speech regulation. However, on the other side of this development is increased user vulnerability to digital surveillance, the third main issue raised by Balkin (2018a, 2018b). Considering how monetization of consumer data has become the primary source of revenue for tech giants such as Google and Facebook (DeNardis, 2020), as part of a business model Zuboff (2019) calls 'surveillance capitalism,' this is arguably an ongoing process of increasing magnitude.

While there are multiple ways of conceptualizing the central aspect of free expression, the argument from a democratic standpoint in its most basic form stems from the idea that freedom of political debate and thus the flow of information and ideas must be protected in order for voters to reach a high level of knowledge (Oster, 2017). At face value, the three interlinked problems above seem like ingredients for the antithesis of a transparent, democratic system with equal access and freedom of speech. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the introduction, the current infrastructural set-up seems to be in motion (Mosco, 2016). In order to explore what such a future development may look like, in the next section the triangular model above is applied from the perspective of letting one player in the triangle each take the lead with basis in current developments. Three possible scenarios appear, labelled by their primary characteristic: government regulation, privatized 'walled gardens,' and decentralization. Each scenario is discussed below, with emphasis on consequences for the issues of the risk of censorship, lack of due process and transparency, and digital surveillance.

4. Three Scenarios

4.1. Scenario 1: Government Regulation

A situation where government takes the lead in the context of speech regulation may seem superfluous, as governments and other public entities already form a natural and essential player in our current system. However, when it comes to new-school speech regulation, actions by government can be pushed very far. In the contemporary situation, China serves as the clearest example (Romano, 2010), with grave consequences for censorship, transparency, and surveillance.

According to Moore (2018, p. 237), about a decade ago, the Chinese government saw the opportunity to, with the aid of tech companies, 'tame' the Internet and thereby establish more centralized control over society than ever before seen, resulting in "an arsenal that would make any twentieth century totalitarian state extremely jealous." This 'taming' has multiple features. Most notably there is the Chinese government's Golden Shield Project put into operation already in 2003, a very comprehensive domestic surveillance system often referred to as 'the Great Firewall,' which enables comprehensive censoring of unwanted Internet content (Merrill, 2016, p. 90; Moore, 2018). The Chinese government has since expanded its ability to control information by establishing the country's national social credit score system, in which speech is one of the factors that determines a citizen's "trustworthiness" (DeNardis, 2020). Importantly, the Chinese government is able to accomplish this unprecedented level of centralization thanks to co-operation by tech companies, both Chinese and foreign (Moore, 2018; Romano, 2010).

Yet China is not the only empirical indicator of the possible scenario for how far a development toward increased government control and regulation can proceed. The most extreme method of controlling the Internet is to simply shut it down, colloquially known as having ac-

cess to an "Internet kill switch" (Vargas-Leon, 2016). The shut-downs in a number of countries during the Arab Spring illustrate the reality of this development, yet is applicable not only by distinctly authoritarian governments. For example, in 2019, Russia adopted a law that allows the government to cut off the Internet entirely (Kennedy, 2019). Furthermore, among the ten governments that attempted to flip the switch between 2009 and 2014, the well-consolidated democracy Australia was among them. The idea of providing government the power to shut down the Internet legally has also been discussed in both the U.K. and the U.S. (Vargas-Leon, 2016). In other words, the norm of censoring the Internet extends globally (Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski, & Zittrain, 2010).

While there may be multiple reasons as to why democratic governments establish tools to, if not shut down the Internet, at least have the ability to regulate, surveil, and censor it, the balancing act of still maintaining a free Internet might prove difficult. Independent watchdog organization Freedom House concluded in their latest report that Internet freedom declined for the ninth consecutive year globally (Shahbaz & Funk, 2019). The organization particularly highlighted social media, pointing to platforms being surveilled by repressive governments. Yet also in democracies, mass monitoring is becoming more common across government agencies. For example, the U.K. is noted for its government's increasing interest in regulating platforms and content online, monitoring of activists from various political groups using data obtained from platforms as well as a novel form of Internet access restriction employed when Wi-Fi connections in some of London's Underground train stations were suspended by the police during protests (Shahbaz & Funk, 2019). Such findings seem to follow the logic of research found almost a decade prior regarding the U.K.'s vast surveillance measures and, at that point, limited yet burgeoning filtering of online content (Deibert et al., 2010). In Germany, a uniquely strict and heavily criticized law that required social media platforms to swiftly remove hate speech or face hefty fines has since adoption in 2017 been found to lead to excessive blocking of content (Thomasson, 2018). The law was enacted due to an apparent frustration with some of the major U.S. social media platforms when it came to removing content considered to be unlawful (Gorwa, 2019b). Thus, even at relatively milder forms, with democratic governments at the helm of actively intervening and trying to remove deeply disturbing or unwanted content under what can be labelled as "external governance" (Gorwa, 2019b, p. 863), there is a risk of censorship, lack of due process through public-private cooperation, and surveillance.

4.2. Scenario 2: Privatized 'Walled Gardens'

Tech companies already play an essential role in new-school speech regulation in tandem with public entities, yet in a scenario where they are empowered, such

ties could alter. Instead of moderating speech in various forms based upon governmental regulations, expanding the scope of the control that can be exercised over access in the first place constitutes another path.

One model for such expansion is a zero-rating service, providing Internet access for free but under certain conditions, such as limits on which sites can be visited. The concept has been around since the early 2010s, with a number of projects having been launched such as Google FreeZone, Wikipedia Zero, and perhaps most famously, Facebook's Free Basics initiative (Bates, Bavitz, & Hessekiel, 2017). Proponents argue that zero rating may be the first step toward expanding access in underserved markets. Critics point to how much control over content the model enables, as well as violations of net neutrality principles by not treating all Internet traffic equally (Bates et al., 2017), in essence providing a 'walled garden' version of the Internet (DeNardis, 2020). For instance, Free Basics in India did not allow users to make voice calls and reserved Facebook the right to limit access to other services (Culpepper & Thelen, 2020). After much public debate, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India also ruled that Free Basics violated the country's net neutrality and thereby effectively banned all zero-ratings plans (Prasad, 2018). Facebook has nevertheless pursued the project elsewhere and it is currently available in 65 countries of which about half are in Africa (Nothias, 2020).

The idea of a walled garden service in a tech-oriented future scenario can however take on other more comprehensive infrastructural forms. In 2019, Amazon filed for U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) permission to launch Project Kuiper, which if successful enables the company to become an Internet Service Provider by providing satellite broadband. Other competing companies such as SpaceX, WebOne, and Facebook have also joined in the quest to establish space-based Internet services. Arguments by proponents resemble those of zero rating-services, i.e., Internet access being provided to the worlds' many underserved consumers (Kuiper Systems LLC, 2019; Pressman, 2019).

Providing low-cost Internet service to potentially billions of users worldwide arguably constitutes an example of how private enterprise can open up the field, increasing accessibility and encouraging competition. While companies such as Amazon and Facebook did express criticism over the FCC's decision in 2017 to roll back net neutrality rules (Wattles, 2017), it is nevertheless a possibility that either one of the competing companies end up offering a very affordable service, yet with various types of restrictions. In fact, a walled garden approach could be a logical development of a continuous extension of the scope of privatized governance already established, with fuel being provided by a constant flow of highly valuable social data.

Finally, developments in institutionalization of content control among platforms provide an additional illustration of where an empowered private triangle corner could be heading. Claiming the company should

not "make so many important decisions about free expression and safety on our own" (Zuckerberg, 2018), Facebook in May 2020 announced an independent Oversight Board to perform this task (Clegg, 2020), a move argued to represent nothing short of a "pivotal moment in the history of online speech governance" (Douek, 2019, p. 4). In the same month, Amazon's livestreaming platform Twitch announced its Safety Advisory Council, whose purpose is to shape the platform's policies on bans, for example, after accusations of unfounded bans of streamers (Greenspan, 2020). No platform board or council will however be able to provide due process in the handling of all content violation reports filed on a daily basis, nor appease all critics of censorship. Instead, and especially in combination with a walled garden Internet service, the level of control over allowed speech at a global scale can potentially increase multifold if tech companies take the lead.

4.3. Scenario 3: Decentralization

The third scenario involves the corner of the triangle subject to speech regulation from both other corners, namely actual speakers using digital infrastructure to communicate or access information. While speakers have the ability to exit platforms or services, or in various other ways protest or put pressure on tech companies to modify their policies (Balkin, 2018a), in the pluralist model of speech regulation, speakers take on the role of underdog. Indeed, the three main issues of censorship, lack of due process, and digital surveillance all have a direct effect on them.

A theoretical scenario where speakers are put at the helm of the development of the digital world would mean a renegotiation of the drastically unequal power relationship with the two other corners of the triangle. In the mid-1990s, cyber activist John Perry Barlow (1996, para. 8) argued for a radically free Internet existing beyond the grip of traditional governing institutions "where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity." Such ideas have since been dismissed as absurd and utopian (Morrison, 2009). Yet aspects of pre-commercial Internet, when individual computers connected with each other in a network without a centralized transit point (Musiani, 2015), are still highly relevant under the concept of the 'Decentralized Web' (DW).

In its very simplest form, a decentralized network removes the need for a central server and allows for multiple servers (or 'nodes') to cooperate, in essence all supplying capacity in terms of storage and computing power (Kremenova & Gajdos, 2019). Multiple examples of DW platforms, applications, and services using peer-to-peer decentralized protocols have so far been established; current examples include the open source microblogging service Mastodon, the social network Diaspora, and the video-sharing platform PeerTube. At the core of this new technology is that communicating via a DW platform means social data is no longer centralized and owned by a tech company, meaning that mining data on users becomes more difficult (Raman, Joglekar, De Cristofaro, Sastry, & Tyson, 2019). As the fundamentals of new-school speech regulation transform when users can be in charge of their own data, issues of digital surveillance and ultimately blocking of users in a process void of due process are no longer the same.

However, peer-to-peer digital tools such as blockchain technology may also alter another aspect of the speaker in Balkin's triangle beyond the individual user, namely news media and journalists. While still very much under development, the technology can allow journalism to be less dependent on an intermediary, meaning actors with direct or indirect interests on the information and news being produced, such as large media corporations, private enterprises, and even politicians. Reducing the distance between journalist and reader by removing centralized control mechanism in both the creation and management of news content can potentially enhance news credibility and transparency, and even limit the spread of unwanted content such as fake news (Al-Saqaf & Edwardsson, 2019).

Finally, relating to the theme of speakers gaining more control is the idea of transforming the entire concept of what the Internet is and who should govern it. As technology advances and human dependence on the Internet increases, the argument is that the Internet should be treated not as a commercial product but as a public utility, controlled by citizens (Mosco, 2016). The concept was, for example, echoed in the 2016 U.K. Labour Party's campaign for free broadband through a new public company (Corbyn, 2016), but various more local versions of publicly owned Internet providers have been in place for years. Most notably, there is the U.S. city of Chattanooga, Tennessee, where affordable high-speed broadband has been offered by a city-owned utility since 2010 (Flessner, 2020). Additionally, local initiatives can help underserved non-metropolitan areas, such as in the U.S., where cooperatives provide almost a third of all Internet fiber service in rural areas, resembling how cooperatives in the country have historically been able to provide both electric-and telephone services rurally (Trostle, Kienbaum, Andrews, & Mitchell, 2019). The potential for enhancing democracy via decentralized models and a different type of ownership model of the Internet itself is thus apparent, while currently existing only in minor scale.

4.4. Discussion

While Balkin's model of free speech as a triangle allows for an examination of the relationships between the main players involved, highlighting that we have moved far from a predominantly dualist system, the gains made from simplifying a highly complex situation create a deficit when it comes to nuance. To begin with, it means

that relationships within the corners themselves are not fully illuminated. An example is the placing of 'legacy media' in the same corner as everyday users, an issue which can be illustrated using an on-going development. Amazon contracts with the U.S. government, particularly when it comes to web storage; the U.S. government has been projected to become Amazon's biggest customer (DePillis, 2018). In 2013, Amazon's founder Jeff Bezos purchased legacy newspaper *The Washington Post*, quickly raising concerns regarding potential conflicts of interest and the ability for the newspaper to maintain unbiased news reporting, especially when it came to the U.S. government (Hart, 2013). In short, the effect of new school speech regulation on citizens is thus difficult to conceptualize as being equal to that of legacy media.

Secondly, the sharp corners of the triangle obscure potential merging points. By merging points, I mean an altering of the relationship primarily speakers have to either one of the two other corners. For instance, and as alluded to in the third scenario, the relationship between governments and its citizens can feature a wholly different level of transparency and accessibility, as proposed by Mosco (2016). It is for example possible for government to, via a decentralized system, provide extensive access to personal data, such in the case of Estonia, a pioneer in terms of e-government and in the very top in terms of Internet freedom (Shahbaz & Funk, 2019). The approach of a highly advanced e-government, where the citizen is more of an active partner than a passive consumer of services (Linders, 2012; Linders, Liao, & Wang, 2018), can also enable new forms of cooperation and participation affecting actual policies not only between government and citizens, but also incorporating tech companies. Taiwan's participatory digital democracy and the ideas of its Digital Minister Audrey Tang (see, e.g., Tang, 2019a, 2019b, 2020) serve as an example here and apply not only to how public services are conceived, constructed, and delivered by involving multiple stakeholders, but to how the issue of harmful content online can be approached. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, Taiwan's strategy to counter disinformation online was called "humor over rumor," a strategy which involved government swiftly communicating factually-based humorous 'packages' that in essence disrobed the false information instead of removing it, which was not seen as an option (Tang, 2020). In order to combat information with intent to cause harm, the strategy again did not involve takedowns of posts on social media. Instead, the government collaborated with both journalists and social media companies to ensure that a small reminder text was added to for example an image being used to promote a false narrative, enabling users to quickly identify actual versus false news material (Tang, 2020).

The second theoretically possible merging point in the triangle is between speakers and private enterprises. Considering the problematization of Internet governance and regulation being in private hands in the second scenario above, this may seem far-fetched.

Nevertheless, by conceptualizing privately owned online platforms as operating civic functions, a meeting point at least arguably appears between the two corners. As Are (2020) argues, privately owned online platforms today function as public spaces, integrated in our everyday lives and as sites for public discourse, and therefore the norms, rules, and laws, including international human rights law, which apply to off-line businesses, should apply also to them. Are (2020) defines social media platforms as "corpo-civic" to capture the hybridity of the space, where users can be seen as quasi-citizens and, following such a status, be empowered to partake in more fair, transparent, and diverse moderation of online content than current methods headed by the tech companies (Kaye, 2019). The model also involves the third corner of the triangle, government, seeing its function to among other things uphold the rights of users and maintain oversight of the platforms (Are, 2020; Kaye, 2019), thereby offering further possible meeting points between the three corners. In an alternate version, a form of 'co-governance' of the online space could also develop if civil rights organizations, part of the same corner as users, could be involved in setting up ethical frameworks and oversight for privately owned online platforms (Gorwa, 2019a, 2019b).

5. Conclusions

Based upon the idea of not overlooking the aspect of control over content when it comes our ability to partake in a future social Internet, with all its conflicting features of incredible freedom to engage in democratic discourse on the one hand, and restrictions, bans, and surveillance on the other, this article has explored three possible scenarios for Internet governance. I find that more of the same, when it comes to either one of the first two scenarios where governments and private enterprise respectively are at the forefront of developments, will, from the perspective of Balkin's (2018a, 2018b) new-school speech regulation, have potentially dire consequences for participation and accessibility. Managing content in all its forms, particularly on social media platforms, will be difficult without users and journalists being subjected to various forms of continuously expanding regulations and restrictions. While actions may be well intended, the inherent logic in needing to know more about speakers, including news media, in order to prevent certain content from appearing, coupled with ownership of the entire service to begin with, will unlikely increase transparency and accountability. A systematic sense of due process is moreover likely impossible, as control needs to be maintained over billions of users and their subsequent actions online. The introduction of automated content moderation may seem like a solution and a way for platforms to take more responsibility, but research shows that such methods may exacerbate the problems of lack of transparency already in existence today (Gorwa, Binns, & Katzenbach, 2020).

Regarding the third scenario, where more control is in various ways transferred to the speakers, the prospects arguably look far brighter when it comes to the freedom of expression and participation, ultimately strengthening transparency and accountability. However, such a model actualizes the issue of harmful content yet again, content that in various ways threatens individuals or groups, toxifies, and polarizes communication, potentially hindering participation and voices being heard. A decentralized system does not immediately 'solve' the proliferation of such content. What it may enable is for users themselves to engage more in moderation on platforms and communities they wish to join online, as well as more independence for news media.

The idea of treating the Internet as a public utility, as also discussed in the third scenario, nevertheless illustrates the potential of substantial change occurring in the relationship between speakers and governments in the future. If citizens and governments join efforts in the management of information by representative institutions at local all the way up to global level, the establishment of rules and regulations for participation and freedom of speech can become more anchored in the democratic process, instead of drifting away from it. Different types of hybrid models are also possible, such as in the example of very advanced forms of e-government increasing and facilitating transparency and possibilities for cooperation between citizens and government, as well as tech companies.

Lastly, two significant developments during the first half of 2020 provide avenues for future research. First of all, the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences for citizens worldwide will be a topic for research for many years to come. The pandemic can, in the context of Internet governance, be examined not only regarding the spread of disinformation and how it was handled by different countries and platforms in a time of crisis—examining potential changes in the power struggles between the three corners of Balkin's triangle—but it can also be studied in regards of the importance of accessibility and participation, as the Internet's function as a crucial site of public discourse, information, and everyday existence expanded as many citizens spent extensive time in the home. The second relevant development stems from the wave of protests against police violence and racial injustice following the killing of George Floyd in May in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Social media giants faced significant criticism for being sites of hateful content, in the case of Facebook followed also by numerous advertising boycotts by major international brands. In response, some of them took steps to ban and block users and content, such as when video streaming platform Twitch temporarily suspended U.S. President Donald Trump's channel, and social media site Reddit banned a pro-Trump forum (Allyn, 2020). Building upon the momentum of a movement of engaged groups, methods of involving civil society in content moderation can be examined, as also suggested by Gorwa (2019a) and Suzor (2020).

References

Allagui, I. (2014). Waiting for spring: Arab resistance and change. *International Journal of Communication*, 8, 983–1007.

Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *31*(2), 211–253.

Allyn, B. (2020, June 29). Reddit bans The_Donald, forum of nearly 800,000 Trump fans, over abusive posts. *NPR*. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2020/06/29/884819923/reddit-bans-the_donald-forum-of-nearly-800-000-trump-fans-over-abusive-posts

Al-Saqaf, W., & Edwardsson, M. P. (2019). Could blockchain save journalism? An explorative study of blockchain's potential to make journalism a more sustainable business. In M. Ragnedda & G. Destefanis (Eds.), *Blockchain and Web 3.0: Social, economic, and technological challenges* (pp. 97–113). London: Routledge.

Andersson Schwarz, J. (2017). Platform logic: An interdisciplinary approach to the platform-based economy. *Policy & Internet*, *9*(4), 374–394.

Are, C. (2020). A corpo-civic space: A notion to address social media's corporate/civic hybridity. *First Monday*, *25*(6). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v25i6.10603

Arpagian, N. (2016). The delegation of censorship to the private sector. In F. Musiani, D. L. Cogburn, L. DeNardis, & D. L. Cogburn (Eds.), *The turn to infrastructure in Internet governance* (pp. 155–165). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Assimakopoulos, S., Baider, F. H., & Millar, S. (Eds.). (2017). *Online hate speech in the European Union: A discourse-analytic perspective*. Cham: Springer.

Balkin, J. M. (2004). Digital speech and democratic culture: A theory of freedom of expression for the information society. *New York University Law Review*, *79*(1), 1–55.

Balkin, J. M. (2014). Old school/new school speech regulation. *Harvard Law Review*, *127*, 2296–2341. Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2377526

Balkin, J. M. (2018a). Free speech in the algorithmic society: Big data, private governance, and new school speech regulation. *UC Davis Law Review*, *51*, 1149–1210.

Balkin, J. M. (2018b). Free speech is a triangle. *Columbia Law Review*, *118*, 2011–2055. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers/5160

Barlow, J. P. (1996). A declaration of the independence of cyberspace. *Electronic Frontier Foundation*. Retrieved from https://projects.eff.org/~barlow/Declaration-Final.html

Bates, S., Bavitz, C., & Hesskiel, K. (2017). *Zero rating & Internet adoption: The role of Telcos, ISPs, & technology companies in expanding global Internet access* (Research Publication No. 2017–9). Cambridge, MA: Berkman Klein Center. Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3047847

Birnhack, M. D., & Elkin-Koren, N. (2003). The invisible handshake: The reemergence of the state in the digital environment. *Virginia Journal of Law and Technology*, *8*, 1–57.

Blumler, J. G. (2015). Core theories of political communication: Foundational and freshly minted. *Communication Theory*, *25*, 426–438.

Chadwick, A., & Howard, P. (Eds.). (2009). *Routledge handbook of Internet politics*. London: Routledge.

Clegg, N. (2020, May 6). Welcoming the oversight board. *About Facebook*. Retrieved from https://about.fb.com/news/2020/05/welcoming-the-oversight-board

Coche, E. (2018). Privatised enforcement and the right to freedom of expression in a world confronted with terrorism propaganda online. *Internet Policy Review*, *7*(4). https://doi.org/10.14763/2018.4.1382

Corbyn, J. (2016). The digital democracy manifesto. *Jeremy for Labour*. Retrieved from https://www.jeremyforlabour.com/digital_democracy_manifesto

Culpepper, P. D., & Thelen, K. (2020). Are we all Amazon Primed? Consumers and the politics of platform power. *Comparative Political Studies*, *53*(2), 288–318.

Deibert, R., Palfrey, J., Rohozinski, R., & Zittrain, J. (Eds.). (2010). *Access controlled: The shaping of power, rights, and rule in cyberspace*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

DeNardis, L. (2014). *The global war for Internet governance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

DeNardis, L. (2020). *The Internet in everything: Freedom and security in a world with no off switch*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

DePillis, L. (2018, November 15). Amazon's biggest customer may soon be the US government. *CNN*. Retrieved from https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/15/business/amazon-government/index.html

Douek, E. (2019). Facebook's "oversight board": Move fast with stable infrastructure and humility. *North Carolina Journal of Law & Technology*, *21*(1), 1–78. Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3365358

Flessner, D. (2020, May 11). Chattanooga recognized as digital inclusion trailblazer for broadband services, high-speed internet access. *Chattanooga Times Free Press*. Retrieved from https://www.timesfreepress.com/news/business/aroundregion/story/2020/may/11/chattanooga-digital-inclusion-trailblazer/522730

Gillespie, T. (2015). Platforms intervene. *Social Media + Society*, *2015*, 1–2. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115580479

Gillespie, T. (2018). *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, content moderation, and the hidden decisions that shape social media*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Goldsmith, J., & Woods, A. K. (2020, April 25). Internet speech will never go back to normal. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/what-covid-revealed-about-internet/610549

Gorwa, R. (2019a). The platform governance triangle: Conceptualising the informal regulation of online content. *Internet Policy Review*, *8*(2). https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.2.1407

Gorwa, R. (2019b). What is platform governance? *Information, Communication & Society*, *22*(6), 854–871.

Gorwa, R., Binns, R., & Katzenbach, C. (2020). Algorithmic content moderation: Technical and political challenges in the automation of platform governance. *Big Data & Society*, *7*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951719897945

Greenspan, R. E. (2020, May 14). Twitch is launching an advisory council that includes top streamers in the wake of months of criticism over controversial bans. *Business Insider*. Retrieved from https://www.businessinsider.com/twitch-safety-advisory-council-board-help-guide-policies-ban-2020-5?r=US&IR=T

Harmer, E., & Lumsden, K. (2019). Introduction: Online othering. In K. Lumsden & E. Harmer (Eds.), *Online othering: Exploring violence and discrimination on the Web* (pp. 1–33). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hart, P. (2013). Amazon, WikiLeaks, the Washington Post and the CIA. *FAIR*. Retrieved from https://fair.org/home/amazon-wilkileaks-the-washington-post-and-the-cia

Kaye, D. (2019). *Speech police: The global struggle to govern the Internet*. New York, NY: Columbia Global Reports.

Keipi, T., Näsi, M., Oksanen, A., & Räsänen, P. (2017). *Online hate and harmful content: Cross-national perspectives*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Kennedy, M. (2019, November 1). New Russian law gives government sweeping power over Internet. *NPR*. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2019/11/01/775366588/russian-law-takes-effect-that-gives-government-sweeping-power-over-internet

Klonick, K. (2018). The new governors: The people, rules, and processes governing online speech. *Harvard Law Review*, *131*, 1598–1670.

Kremenova, I., & Gajdos, M. (2019). Decentralized networks: The future Internet. *Mobile Networks and Applications*, *24*, 2016–2023.

Kuiper Systems LLC. (2019). Application for authority to launch and operate a non-geostationary satellite orbit system in Ka-band frequencies. Kuiper Systems LLC: Redmond, WA. Retrieved from https://licensing.fcc.gov/myibfs/download.do?attachment_key=1773656

Lessig, L. (1998). *The laws of cyberspace*. Paper presented at the Taiwan Net '98 Conference, Taipei, Taiwan. Retrieved from https://cyber.harvard.edu/works/lessig/laws_cyberspace.pdf

Lessig, L. (2000). Code is law: On liberty in cyberspace. *Harvard Magazine*. Retrieved from https://harvardmagazine.com/2000/01/code-is-law-html

Linders, D. (2012). From e-government to we-government: Defining a typology for citizen co-production in the age of social media. *Government Information Quarterly*, *29*, 446–454.

Linders, D., Liao, C. Z. P., & Wang, C. M. (2018). Proactive e-governance: Flipping the service delivery model from pull to push in Taiwan. *Government Information Quarterly*, *35*, 68–76.

Merrill, K. (2016). Domains of control: Governance of and by the domain name system. In F. Musiani, D. L. Cogburn, L. DeNardis, & D. L. Cogburn (Eds.), *The turn to infrastructure in Internet governance* (pp. 89–106). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Moore, M. (2018). *Democracy hacked: Political turmoil and information warfare in the digital age*. London: Oneworld Publications.

Morrison, A. H. (2009). An impossible future: John Perry Barlow's 'Declaration of the independence of cyberspace.' *New Media & Society*, *11*(1/2), 53–72.

Mosco, V. (2016). After the Internet: New technologies, social issues, and public policies. *Fudan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *10*, 297–313.

Musiani, F. (2015). Giants, dwarfs and decentralized alternatives to Internet-based services: An issue of Internet governance. *Westminister Papers in Culture and Communication*, *10*(1), 81–94.

Nothias, T. (2020). Access granted: Facebook's free basics in Africa. *Media, Culture & Society*, *42*(3), 329–348.

Oster, J. (2017). Which limits on freedom of expression are legitimate? Divergence of free speech values in Europe and the United States. In U. Kohl (Ed.), *The net and the nation state: Multidisciplinary perspectives on Internet governance* (pp. 72–91). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Poster, M. (1997). Cyberdemocracy: Internet and the public sphere. In D. Porter (Ed.), *Internet culture* (pp. 201–218). New York, NY: Routledge.

Prasad, R. (2018). Ascendant India, digital India: How net neutrality advocates defeated Facebook's free basics. *Media, Culture & Society*, *40*(3), 415–431.

Pressman, A. (2019). Why Facebook, SpaceX and dozens of others are battling over Internet access from space. *Fortune*. Retrieved from https://fortune.com/2019/01/25/facebook-spacex-internet-access-space

Raman, A., Joglekar, S., De Cristofaro, E., Sastry, N., & Tyson, G. (2019). Challenges in the decentralised web: The Mastodon case. In *Internet Measurement Conference (IMC 2019)* (pp. 217-229). New York: ACM. Retrieved from https://arxiv.org/abs/1909.05801

Romano, A. (2010). Asia. In P. Norris (Ed.), *Public sentinel: News media and governance reform* (pp. 353–376). Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Shahbaz, A., & Funk, A. (2019). *Freedom on the net: The crisis of social media*. Washington, DC: Freedom House. Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2019/crisis-social-media

Sunstein, C. R. (1995). The First Amendment in cyberspace. *The Yale Law Journal*, *104*(7), 1757–1804.

Suzor, N. (2020). *Lawless: The secret rules that govern our digital lives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tang, A. (2019a, March 12). How to fix democracy: Inside Taiwan's new digital democracy. *The Economist*. Retrieved from https://www.economist.com/open-future/2019/03/12/inside-taiwans-new-digital-democracy

Tang, A. (2019b, May 8). *Digital social innovation to empower democracy* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/audrey_tang_digital_social_innovation_to_empower_democracy

Tang, A. (2020, June 1). *How digital innovation can fight pandemics and strengthen democracy* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/audrey_tang_how_digital_innovation_can_fight_pandemics_and_strengthen_democracy#t-39393

Thomasson, E. (2018, March 8). Germany looks to revise social media law as Europe watches. *Reuters*. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-hatespeech/germany-looks-to-revise-social-media-law-as-europe-watches-idUSKCN1GK1BN

Trostle, H., Kienbaum, K., Andrews, M., & Mitchell, C. (2019, December 17). Cooperatives fiberize rural America: A trusted model for the Internet era. *Institute for Local Self-Reliance*. Retrieved from https://muninetworks.org/reports/edit-report-cooperatives-fiberize-rural-america-trusted-model-internet-era-updated-dec-2019

Ullman, S., & Tomalin, M. (2019). Quarantining online hate speech: Technical and ethical perspectives. *Ethics and Information Technology*, *22*, 69–80.

van der Wilk, A. (2018). *Cyber violence and hate speech online against women*. Brussels: European Parliament. Retrieved from https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1ccedce6-c5ed-11e8-9424-01aa75ed71a1

Vargas-Leon, P. (2016). Tracking Internet shutdown practices: Democracies and hybrid regimes. In F. Musiani, D. L. Cogburn, L. DeNardis, & D. L. Cogburn (Eds.), *The turn to infrastructure in Internet governance* (pp. 166–188). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wattles, J. (2017, December 14). Net neutrality re-

peal: Facebook, Amazon, Netflix and internet providers react. *CNN*. Retrieved from https://money.cnn.com/2017/12/14/technology/business/fcc-net-neutrality-reactions/index.html

World Health Organization. (2020, February 2). *Novel Coronavirus (2019-NCoV): Situation report 13*. Geneva: World Health Organization. Retrieved from www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200202-sitrep-13-ncov-v3.pdf

York, J. C., & Zuckerman, E. (2019). Moderating the public sphere. In R. F. Jørgensen (Ed.), *Human rights in the age of platforms* (pp. 137–161). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for the future at the new frontier of power*. London: Profile Books.

Zuckerberg, M. [Mark]. (2018, November 15). A blueprint for content governance and enforcement [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/notes/mark-zuckerberg/a-blueprint-for-content-governance-and-enforcement/10156443129621634

About the Author

Emma Ricknell is a PhD Candidate at Linneaus University, Sweden. Her research interests include online communities, extremism, social media, and evolving forms of and conditions for political participation in the current media environment. Her past work includes a study analyzing discussions held on 4chan regarding the 2018 Swedish general election.

Article

'Four Populisms' of Alexey Navalny: An Analysis of Russian Non-Systemic Opposition Discourse on YouTube

Sofya Glazunova

Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, QLD 4059, Australia;
E-Mail: s.glazunova@qut.edu.au

Abstract
The rise of populist movements across the globe has instigated considerable research interest into populism, predominantly in Western democracies. Non-democratic Russia, however, is not exempt from this populist trend, and distinguishable populist rhetoric can be observed both inside and outside the establishment. Alexey Navalny, who regularly organises mass protests in Russia, is considered to be an outsider of systemic politics. Despite several unsuccessful attempts to be elected, his popularity continues to grow, largely due to digital instruments such as YouTube. In light of limited press freedom, YouTube has become one of the most trustworthy platforms for Navalny to publish his investigative documentaries about Russian corruption. In his videos, Navalny adopts a populist communication style to oppose himself to Putin's 'corrupt' elite. Different investigative journalism practices help Navalny to discredit the establishment, whereas his activist appeals may motivate his supporters to engage in political action. In this article, I explore how Navalny combines the practices of investigative journalism and civic activism in his populist communication on YouTube. Using the method of content analysis, I explore a case study of Navalny's YouTube communication and reveal four types of populism which play a special role in his narration. These are 'superficial,' 'investigative,' 'radical,' and 'advocacy' populisms. Advocacy populism, for instance, provides evidence of corruption elite crimes through journalism practices and in calling people to political action. The most visible concentration of these parts of narration was observed in YouTube videos released by the activist before and during anti-corruption protests of 2017.

1. Introduction

2021 marks three decades since the Soviet Union dissolution, which has changed the political trajectories of all countries of the former Soviet bloc. Russia, as a successor of the Soviet Union, has undergone several political transformations since, including changes in its communication about politics. The relative press freedom in post-Glasnost Russia increased transparency in political communication (PC) from 1986 to the 1990s. However, after the Soviet structure's dissolution this openness was progressively curtailed. It was replaced by limited freedom of speech, elimination, harassment, as well as censorship of dissident journalists and media (Becker, 2004).

A growth in authoritarian tendencies in Russia has been well-documented in 2019 (Repucci, 2019). While undoubtedly a matter of concerns for some, it has also led to the emergence of new hybrid communication projects that oppose mainstream narratives using digital technologies. Opposition leader Alexey Navalny stands exemplar of someone who creatively uses communication tools and populist discourses to challenge the dominant political elite—a strategy he has employed since rising to popularity in the 2010s (Gel'man, 2015).

Navalny established himself as a key oppositional figure during the mass protests of 2011–2012, which occurred in response to Russia's parliamentary and presidential elections. The various opposition forces united then towards two common goals: the reconsideration of the parliamentary election results and the resignation of high-ranking officials. Among prominent figures at the protests were activists such as Nemtsov, Kasyanov, Dmitry and Gennady Gudkovs, and Navalny himself. The enthusiasm of protesters and activists quickly faded as protesters realised they were far from succeeding their goals (Gel'man, 2015). Due to harassment, most of these opposition figures have been less prominent in the public sphere of the 2010s than Navalny. He managed to remain a popular, 'non-systemic' politician in Russia—in essence, a non-elected politician operating outside of the political system.

Despite frequent harassment, Navalny published numerous journalistic investigations of Russian politicians' corruption on his social media platforms—an act which resonated across several publics. These were the investigations into the corruption cases of Russian General Prosecutor Chaika, businessman Deripaska and former Deputy PM Prihod'ko and others. The most resonant documentary on his channel about former Prime Minister (PM) Medvedev led to several large-scale protests across major Russian metropoles in 2017. These were the first regular, mass anti-government protests to occur—reminiscent of the events in 2011–2012. Unlike his opposition colleagues, Navalny managed to secure a communication strategy of attracting anti-government movement supporters, which involved different communication instruments.

This article addresses the following research question: how does Navalny combine practices of investigative journalism (IJ) and digital activism in his populist communication on YouTube? The text transcripts of Navalny's YouTube videos containing these practices, released during his campaign for the 2018 presidential election, are studied through the method of content analysis. In addition to the narration, which can be considered as one of the representations of political performance (Rai, 2015), the visual aesthetics of stage, body politics (clothing style), and colour of Navalny's YouTube populist performance are explored elsewhere (Glazunova, 2020).

This case study contributes to the evolving corpus of literature on digital media in PC of authoritarian and semi-authoritarian countries. Social media is seen as a more flexible, provoking, and transformative space for diversified communication, particularly in light of limited press freedom.

2. Political Communication Shifts

Research into Navalny's communication is situated in the field of PC. At its most basic level, PC is purposeful communication about politics involving different interest groups. As a phenomenon, it has significantly changed in the 21st century, where many shifts are currently being observed. Three of them have a direct relation to Navalny's communication. Firstly, according to Blumler (2013), we now live in an age characterised by the extensive use of Internet facilities in communication, where newly emerged social media platforms have 'shaken' the established rules of PC. Secondly, in this new PC environment, trust in news media and global press freedom continues to decline (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019; Repucci, 2019). Investigative reporting can play a 'watchdog' role in society, where general coverage of mainstream media fails to follow democratic principles of unbiased and transparent coverage. Lastly, many politicians have started to spread populist messages increasingly, emphasising the purported antagonism between two populist entities of 'the people' vs. 'the elite' in them. Navalny stands out as a prominent example of these observed changes in Russia's PC.

2.1. Digital Media as an Emergent Actor of Political Communication

Citizens, media, and actors seeking political power are considered the major PC actors in exchanging political messages (McNair, 2011). Their history can be traced back for hundreds of years. New actors such as social media platforms appeared later, in the Internet-abundant age of PC (Blumler, 2013). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) defined 'social media' as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." Social media can be considered as a separate actor of PC, following the logic of Schrape (2016, p. 13), who stipulates that "the character limit on Twitter or the algorithmic curation on these social networking platforms as well as on media streaming portals…are not just technical gimmicks but rather social structure elements that are incorporated in the platform design." These social structure elements can play a crucial role in communication about politics.

One of the prominent areas of the research of social media and politics is in the field of digital activism and social movements. In Russia, for example, during the 2011–2012 protests 'for fair elections,' it was found that platforms like Facebook mostly helped to mobilise supporters for the anti-regime demonstrations (White & McAllister, 2014). Nevertheless, the Russian government was also effective in countering protests with information and communications technologies (Spaiser, Chadefaux, Donnay, Russmann, & Helbing, 2017). Notably, these protests were a trigger for the government to further regulate mainstream media and online spaces. Opposition figures like Navalny, who are unsuccessful in being elected, continue to operate from the 'ghetto' (Gel'man, 2013); deploying alternative digital communication instruments including YouTube channels.

Launched in 2005, YouTube (later a Google subsidiary) quickly became the dominant platform in the global social media market (Burgess & Green, 2018). In 2019, YouTube was the most popular digital platform in Russia (Statista, 2019). As a consequence of the declining trust in Russian mainstream media—and TV in particular (FOM, 2018)—YouTube has also become an alternative news medium for Russians, promoting "visually motivated, amateur-driven news culture that alters the truth claims of news and the professional hegemony of news making" (Sumiala & Tikka, 2013, p. 318). In Russia, YouTube gives a voice to amateur, grassroots, citizen, and investigative journalists such as Navalny, who expose corruption and power abuse in the country.

2.2. Investigative Journalism and Its Watchdog Role

In its 2019 report, Freedom House (Repucci, 2019) observed a global trend of declining press freedom. In authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, who are fuelling this decline (such as Russia), the toolbox of media regulation by the state includes: government-backed ownership takeovers, threats against journalists, licensing practices abuse, and other measures (Repucci, 2019). As a result, the need for quality, watchdog IJ arises, which may contribute to challenging the status quo coverage of politics.

To be identified as falling within the investigative genre, a story should be centred on the public interest "by exposing abuses of power in society" (Carson, 2019, p. 65). Moreover, IJ always requires greater time, money, and effort from journalists compared to less complex journalistic genres of conducting investigations (Carson, 2019, p. 66). De Burgh (2008, p. 16) calls these journalistic skills 'desk skills,' meaning that journalists should have "the thorough knowledge of information sources and types and the rules that govern them, the ability to read documents for significance, and an understanding of statistics." In addition, journalists would need to apply a higher level of scrutiny, verify facts, and look for legitimate sources of information (Carson, 2019, p. 66). Journalists are believed to have a hierarchy of evidence, where each information source has its own weight (Ettema & Glasser, 1984, p. 17). The prominent display of collected 'evidence' is considered in this article as one of the crucial indicators of IJ in Navalny's performance.

In a digitised world, journalists need to adapt to new sources, instruments, and channels of information. Depending on the instruments, new sub-types of IJ have emerged; including data journalism, drone journalism, and others types. Data journalism, for example, is "a form of storytelling where traditional journalistic working methods are mixed with data analysis, programming, and visualisation techniques" (Nygren, Appelgren, & Hüttenrauch, 2012, as cited in Appelgren & Nygren, 2014, p. 394). Famous cases of cross-national investigations such as the Panama Papers showed that big data

leaks followed by a concerted effort of journalists working across borders, can help to hold politicians and governments accountable (Carson, 2019).

In the post-Communist countries of Eastern Europe, which Russia is closer to in a political and cultural sense, watchdog reporting operates in a state where "the already resource-weak news organisations" become "even weaker" (Stetka & Örnebring, 2013, p. 414). Stetka and Örnebring (2013) suggest that the number of investigative journalists in the country tends to be correlated to the level of media freedom observed; the freer the media, the higher the number of investigative journalists. They distinguished two major types of IJ in Eastern Europe: mainstream media organisations, as well as Internet-based outlets and projects. The second type of journalism was represented in Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, and Romania, countries with 'partly-free' press at that time (Stetka & Örnebring, 2013).

Russian critical journalists, in turn, associate themselves with opposition and propagate freedom of speech (Repnikova, 2018). The examples of relatively liberal or oppositional outlets include, e.g., the online newspaper *Meduza* (whose headquarters are located in Latvia) and the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, known for its high-profile investigations about political topics. Navalny's engagement on YouTube can be considered as a unique and alternative media project that can potentially contribute to a watchdog role of journalism in the country—combining investigative reporting practices with a call to collective political action for invoking systemic change. In countries with limited press freedom, activists and independent journalists may need to pursue two political goals simultaneously: to overcome restrictions on media freedom and to advocate their essential political rights.

Furthermore, Houston (2010, p. 45) notes that IJ is inherently populist and adversarial in its nature, "challenging the powers that be." By exposing the power abuse and corruption of the 'villains,' protecting the 'victims' (Carson, 2019) and their public interest by sometimes more radically inviting people to action, IJ shares an intersection with populism that is based on the antagonism of 'the people' and 'the elite.' As this article will continue to demonstrate, Navalny has skilfully made use of this intersection for his political purposes.

2.3. Rise of Populist Narratives

There are diverse ways of defining populism. Different scholars understand populism as an ideology (Mudde, 2004), a logic (Laclau, 2005), a discourse (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), a philosophy (Inglehart & Norris, 2016), and a political style (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014) among others. I follow de Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, and Stayner's (2018) notion, which distinguish between the 'style' and the 'content' of populism. The former is "a set of presentational style elements," while the latter is "public communication of core components of populist ideology (such as people-centrism and anti-elitism)"

(de Vreese et al., 2018, p. 425). This definition allows for measuring degrees of populism in discourses (de Vreese et al., 2018, p. 426), which aligns with this article's objectives.

In this study, I focus on Navalny's populist ideological content. Most authors understand people-centrism as referring to 'the people,' where 'people' are the primary source of legitimate power (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016) and sovereignty (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). Using this style of communication, populists associate themselves with 'the people' by appealing or referring to them. This project focusses specifically on the empirical indicators of 'the people' in texts that are often represented by pronouns like 'we' and 'us.' In critical discourse analysis, the use of such pronouns is explained by the desire of the politician "to assimilate 'the people' to the leader, or the leadership" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 180). Addressing the people can also be expressed through mass nouns such as 'people,' 'citizens,' 'voters,' 'taxpayers,' and others.

The populist appeal is distinctly political. Politicians addressing 'the people' usually want some form of direct or indirect action from them. They want citizens to vote in someone's favour, to protest, to disseminate information, and conduct other actions. This 'call to action' is a radical form of appeal to 'the people' in populist communications, and it can be vital to the success of increasing political participation among audiences.

Anti-elitism is another central element of populism. The typical anti-elite descriptions within populism state that elites are distant from 'the people,' associated with the external enemy ('us' vs. 'them'), politically incompetent, and indifferent to the public interest—in effect; saboteurs, corruptors, and betrayers of public trust (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Populists can refer to the elite more generally with collective pronouns and nouns such as 'they,' 'the government,' 'the establishment,' and 'the elite'—but they can also target particular individuals, groups of people, and institutions of political power. In Navalny's communication, it is clear that populists can discredit elites. They can simply bring them into disrepute by using words such as 'crooks' and 'thieves,' or by providing arguments and purported evidence of elites' crimes and misconduct. In the latter case, investigative and advocacy journalists also use evidence to expose the 'villains.'

Navalny uses an investigative genre; employing some evidence of corruption found on social media, the Internet, and other sources to expose Putin's elite. He also publishes predominately on digital channels, which reflects Gerbaudo's (2017) idea of 'cyber-populism' that enables spaces via digital media platforms (free from the state), where citizens can gather and be mobilised for political action. Gerbaudo (2018, p. 746) argues that social media platforms "have offered a channel for the populist yearning to 'represent the unrepresented.'" Among these platforms, YouTube is still overlooked in populism research on 'political' Facebook and Twitter represented

by studies such as Engesser, Ernst, Esser, and Büchel (2017), Waisbord and Amado (2017), Jacobs, Sandberg, and Spierings (2019), and others. However, the performative, participative, and sometimes radical nature of the platform allows for creating and spreading populist counter-narratives in countries like Russia.

Finally, Navalny's ideas exist within the framework of authentic Russian populism. The first mentions of populism in the Russian context were connected with the movement of *Narodniks* ('narod' means 'people' in Russian) in the late 19th—early 20th centuries. Russian intellectual classes in the late 19th century practised what is known as 'goings to the people.' They visited ordinary peasants in villages, propagated distrust in religion, rebuked the authority of the tsar and denounced *samoderzhavie* (autocracy). Modern Russian politicians oppose their counter-elite and seek active feedback from voters. The distinction of 'us' and 'them' in Putin's rhetoric has gone several transformations. 'Them' has previously referred to terrorists, the West and the US in particular; now it is applied to the opposing liberals referred to as 'Fifth Column' (Kolesnikov, Kortunov, & Snegovaya, 2018). The opposition movement of 2011–2012 has also resorted to populist rhetoric in their struggle against Putin's regime (Gel'man, 2015). The latter, as Gel'man (2015) argued, contributed to the re-birth of Russian opposition in the beginning of the 2010s, during the protests when the opposition project of Navalny emerged.

3. Alexey Navalny and the Russian Political Communication Ecosphere

The protests 'for fair elections' led to further restrictions of citizens' political rights, mass media, and the Internet introduced by the Russian establishment. Mainstream media started to be further controlled by a mixture of business and administrative measures—a process that has started back in the 1990s (Becker, 2004). The Internet was usually acknowledged as a freer space for alternative political discourses in Russia (Etling, Alexanyan, Kelly, Farris, & Gasser, 2010). However, the Agora (2018) report states that in 2017, 244 webpages in the RuNet (Russian Internet) were blocked every day, every six days users were harassed or threatened, and every eight days Russian courts sentenced someone to prison in relation to 'misbehaviour' on the Internet (Agora, 2018).

In this environment Navalny's popularity continues to grow, despite his status as an outsider of systemic politics. (Levada, 2017). At the beginning of 2020, his personal blog on YouTube had more than three million subscribers. Several strategies could be observed in his communication with audiences. Firstly, Navalny was still using populist strategies in his rhetoric, apparent since 2011. His recent populist performances echo the activities of Russian populism's founding fathers—Narodnik's movement. To promote anti-establishment sentiments in a contemporary context, Navalny releases a YouTube

video using similar rhetoric instead of physical 'goings to the people.'

Secondly, he extensively employs digital instruments in communicating his message to a peripheral electorate. YouTube is not the only platform that the activist and his team use for communication. However, among all of them, YouTube stands as a relatively free medium that reaches a broad audience across Russia and affords opportunities to contest the regime. Facebook, Twitter, and Google with its subsidiary YouTube (all major international technology companies) are still relatively capable of resisting the RuNet regulations according to an Agora (2019) report. Finally, the format of investigations that Navalny uses for his videos reaches the highest viewership on his channel. As of June 2020, the most popular videos on his channel are investigations into corruption of the former PM (34 million views), the General Prosecutor (12 million views), North Caucasus officials (11 million views), and others. As this article has argued, these strategies can contribute to securing his survival in the Russian public sphere.

4. Methodology

4.1. Methods

This article investigates the case study of populist communication of Alexey Navalny using the method of content analysis. The method was used historically for the investigation of media texts, or to "yield inferences from all kinds of verbal, pictorial, symbolic, and communication data" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 17). As I work with Navalny's communication and conversational data (namely videos and deriving from them texts that require rearticulating or reinterpretation of the messages to understand Navalny's phenomenon better), content analysis is the most suitable research method for this study.

Krippendorff (2012) doubts the dichotomy of qualitative and quantitative content analyses. He notes that "all reading of texts is qualitative by nature," and using computers to analyse them does not make them any less qualitative (p. 22). The qualitative dimension of content analysis is sometimes called 'interpretive' (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 17). Through the close reading of "relatively small amounts of textual matter" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 17), interpretation of texts into new narratives, and culturally conditioned understandings, new inferences of the text are drawn, with new meanings depending perhaps on the theoretical lens. In this research, the quantitative part helped to answer what words and how often they occurred, whereas the qualitative part—through a process of close reading—involved interpreting and contextualising Navalny's communication phenomenon.

The drawbacks of measuring populism by content analysis were described by Pauwels (2011). They include high labour intensity, coder subjectivity, and unreliability (Pauwels, 2011, p. 98). This project addresses these issues, including the ambiguity of the populist phenomenon and the distinctive political context that frames Navalny's communication.

4.2. Data

The main data consisted of Navalny's YouTube videos in transcript form. His channel has existed since 2013. However, I was interested in more recent communications of the activist, connected primarily to his presidential electoral campaign (from December 13, 2016, until the fourth inauguration of President Putin on May 7, 2018). This was the period during which Navalny was most active, thus containing the maximum concentration of posts, including his major investigations on Russian corruption. In these 18 months, Navalny posted 150 videos of varying length. I purposefully shortlisted his most viewed videos, which potentially can have a bigger impact on the audience through their reach; i.e., those above the median of 1,600,000 views. This resulted in 77 videos selected for the sample.

All of the 77 videos were narrated in the Russian language. The total number of words in the selected sample is 83,023 words. The total time length of the selected video sample is 10 hours, 43 minutes, and 7 seconds. The shortest video is 46 seconds long, where Navalny addresses his audience from Simonov's Court. The longest video is 49 minutes and 38 seconds and describes the investigation into corruption of the former Russian PM.

Parts of the videos where Navalny narrated directly to the camera were most prevalent across the videos. However, his videos were frequently interspersed with content from other people's speeches into the narrative structure. For this research, I chose the excerpts that contain only Navalny's direct speech (narration). In total, 331 excerpts among the 77 most viewed videos were identified and subsequently coded in content analysis software NVivo.

4.3. Coding Categories

To ensure a nuanced understanding of Navalny's narration, four coding categories were developed. The two main categories for coding, 'appeal to the people' and 'discrediting the elites' as explained in Section 2.3, were subdivided into two further categories each. An 'appeal to the people' was sub-categorised based on the way the appeal to 'the people' was communicated, as well as the level of radicalisation of the populist call, distinguishing between the categories 'simple addressing' and 'call to action.' The category 'discrediting the elites' was split into 'empty discrediting' and 'discrediting with evidence' to explore the presence of journalistic investigation practices that Navalny uses to discredit elites. Therefore, a total of four categories were coded in the excerpts.

'Simple addressing' is a process where a politician (Navalny specifically) is merely talking to people and invites them to a conversation through the video. He addresses them to associate himself with the audience. In

this case, he does not invite them to a political or another form of action. He uses simple addressing forms using the pronouns 'we' and 'us' as part of the narration (example: "Putin studiously ignores *us*, he keeps repeating that *we* don't have any propositions or a constructive agenda'').

'Call to action' is a radical form of appealing to the people, including an invitation to political action. The call presupposes the subsequent action the populist communicator expects from the audience expressed in action verbs (e.g., to boycott, to vote). A narrator might use the imperative mood to indicate motivating or mobilising supporters around his/her political goals. The excerpts containing a 'call to action' contain 'simple addressing,' too. This overlapping is explained by the fact that in calling people to action, a communicator can use simple words like 'we' and 'us' which are considered as simple forms of addressing people (example: "On May 5th, I *urge all of you* to participate in demonstrations, rallies and protests for *our* right to be the citizens of *our* country'').

'Empty discrediting' is the attempt of a populist to discredit elites, yet this attempt is merely an allegation not supported by evidence, and consists of accusations and denigrations of those who form part of the elite (e.g., calling someone a 'crook' or a 'thief'). In this project, to 'discredit' is understood as ceasing to respect someone or believing an idea or person (example: "Only we can oppose *this ghoul* who's dragging us into poverty and turning Russia into a third world country, just so he can stay in charge and keep getting that fake percentage").

'Discrediting with evidence' is the attempt to discredit the elite through claims that are supported by evidence of a journalistic format, including materials from social media, websites, official documents of the government, and other types of evidence. A narrator should refer to them in his/her texts. 'Discrediting with evidence' a priori contains the category 'empty discrediting,' as Navalny uses words denigrating the elite (e.g., 'crooks,' 'thieves'), but also provides evidence collected through journalistic practices in the same excerpt (example: "While I do it, we'll also entertain you with some *footage of Usmanov's mansion*, so you'll get a chance to see how Russian *oligarchs* live").

Thus, four categories of the ideological content of populism are presented in Figure 1. According to the description of the categories and Figure 1, there were overlapping categories, such as a 'call to action' containing forms of 'simple addressing' as well as 'discrediting with evidence' which consists of 'empty discrediting.' Both coders involved in the process considered those facts but counted only unique and dual combinations of the four categories in the sample, as Table 1 will further demonstrate.

4.4. Reliability

To reach an inter-coder agreement, another Russian speaker was consulted for the coding process. However, Coder 2 did not need a full sample of the excerpts; it could be reached through a representative sub-sample calculated via a specific formula. The agreement was reached through a representative sub-sample calculated using Riffe, Lacy, and Fico's (2014, p. 111) formula as seen in Figure 2. This resulted in a sub-sample of 89 excerpts, chosen randomly out of the aforementioned total of 331.
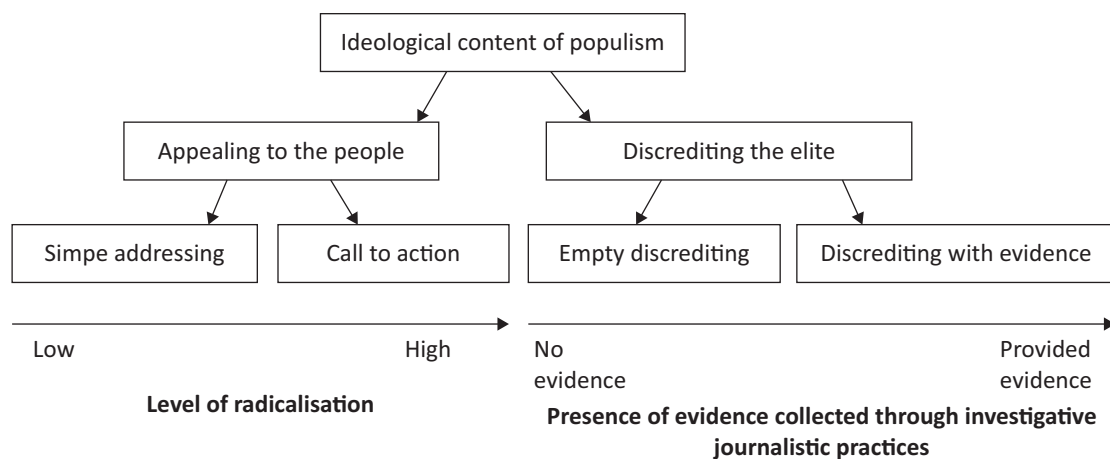

Figure 1. Ideological elements of populism in Navalny's videos: Categories for coding.

Table 1. Types of populisms in Navalny's narration based on the combination of populism sub-categories.

Discrediting the elite/appeal to 'the people'	Simple addressing	Call to action
Empty discrediting	Superficial populism (102)	Radical populism (57)
Discrediting with evidence	Investigative populism (47)	Advocacy populism (11)

Note: The number in brackets represents the number of combinations that appeared in Navalny's video excerpts.

$$n = \frac{(N-1)(SE)^2 + PQN}{(N-1)(SE)^2 + PQ}$$

Figure 2. The formula for the calculation of sub-sample for reproducibility test. Note: n = the size of sub-sample; N = total number of the whole sample; P = desirable level of agreement; SE = standard error; $Q = 1 - P$.

The formula depended on three key factors of intercoder agreement: the total number of text components to be coded, the desired level of agreement and the confidence level desired for the test. $N = 331$ for this research stage, $SE = 0{,}03$ is determined by the level of significance (0.95) and the z-score associated (using the one-tailed version) is 1.64. The desirable level of agreement was 0.7, with the level of confidence being 0.8. The calculated sub-sample with these parameters was 89. Therefore, 89 main excerpts out of 331 were chosen randomly using the online Research Randomizer (Social Psychology Network, n.d.).

The level of agreement was measured for each one of the four categories of populist content. The results of the coding process were transferred to SPSS to calculate Krippendorff's alpha (2004). The standards for data reliability, according to Krippendorff (2004), are that a score between $\alpha = 0.667$ to $\alpha = 0.800$ is considered as substantial, and a score above $\alpha = 0.800$ is considered as perfect agreement. Considering that I explored the ambiguous phenomenon of populism (which had many interpretations), I aimed at reaching a score of $\alpha = 0.750$. In all four categories, the inter-coder agreement reached was as follows: 'simple addressing' (0.7943), 'call to action' (0.8825), 'empty discrediting' (0.7802), and 'discrediting with evidence' (0.7700). This means that the data is reliable and reproducible.

Having four variables (categories) for the analysis resulted in the formation of four combinations of populism categories. I named these according to Table 1 and counted them in NVivo.

4.5. Overview

I constructed the quantitative data's meaning through the qualitative procedures of close reading of the research's sub-sample. I looked at how Navalny addressed 'the people,' what he called these people to do, how he discredited the elite, and what evidence he used to discredit them. Each type of populism (as per Table 1) appeared in a different number of excerpts. The intensive nature of the qualitative part of the analysis made it impractical to analyse all 331 excerpts. I pre-defined the size of the purposive sample for close reading procedures as follows: 'superficial' populism (20 excerpts), 'radical' populism (10 excerpts), 'investigative' populism (10 excerpts), and 'advocacy' populism (10 excerpts). The excerpts were chosen through random sampling using

the web-tool Research Randomizer (Social Psychology Network, n.d.). The summaries of these excerpts were used to develop a deeper understanding of Navalny's populist narrative and what it means for Russia's broader PC ecosphere.

5. Four Types of Populism in Navalny's YouTube Narration

This section will look closely at the main characteristics of these populist excerpts, including their meaning, topics, and structure, to define what each type of populism means in Navalny's narration.

5.1. Superficial Populism

'Superficial' populism is located at 'the surface' of Navalny's narration. The excerpts do not require a lot of effort to create by their narrators and investigators. Navalny does not provide evidence of crimes committed by the elite, or motivate people to engage in activism through radical appeals in these excerpts. In some ways, this could also be referred to as 'passive' populism, which does not require specific actions from the narrator or the audience.

These excerpts can link other parts of narration or serve as the introduction to the investigations or radical appeals. 20 excerpts in the sample are short in length; on average, 197 words each. The longest excerpt within the sample is 738 words, whereas the shortest is 35 words. They are usually located at the beginning and/or in the middle of narration. The themes of these excerpts are also diffused and cover topics from corruption to elections. The elite's critique has a personalised and diffused nature. It targets many different actors of the elite—from executive power to corrupt media representatives.

In these excerpts, there is a simple level of association of Navalny with 'the people' through the words 'we' and 'us,' which may indicate Navalny's intention to build one collective identity opposed to the elite. These principles lie at the heart of populist ideology, and they can explain the dominance of these excerpts in Navalny's populist narration. This also reflects the fact that this populism may be communicated in as little as one or several words, simply by calling someone a 'thief,' a 'liar,' or using personal pronouns. The example of the superficial excerpt criticising main Navalny's rival, Putin, reads as follows:

Thank you, everyone, who participated, organised, and helped. I congratulate you with successful (protest) action in number and geographical scope. We showed that even if Russia is entering the fifth term of Putin, here, there are many of those who are not ready to turn into zombies or became a slave of the self-proclaimed tzar. (Navalny, 2018a)

5.2. Investigative Populism

In these excerpts, Navalny uses investigative journalistic tools to discredit the elite, providing textual references to the evidence of their crimes collected through journalistic practices. 'Investigative' populism excerpts are of medium length compared to other excerpts: the shortest excerpt is 116 words, whereas the longest excerpt is 733 words. The average excerpt in the sample is 316 words. Usually, they are located in the middle of the narration.

Navalny uses many anti-corruption symbols in the texts, including luxurious properties and items that he claims officials possess. He provides examples of the corruption crimes and nepotism of the elites, referring in his claims to a substantial base of journalistic evidence. He employs social media data, photos, interviews, people's CVs, and other forms of journalistic evidence. He mentions these forms of evidence in his narration, but the visual presence of such evidence was not analysed in this research.

The most referred form of evidence in this sample was the drone video footage. Video is one of the trustworthy forms of evidence for IJ (Ettema & Glasser, 1984). Drone footage can be one of the most accessible journalistic instruments available to Navalny and his team; it also requires advanced skills of drone journalism as outlined in his videos:

But today I have something new for you. Many of you, of course, remember that recently we bought a new cool quadcopter and as soon as it arrived we started to figure out how it works, started to learn how to use it, and finally we did a test flight. We decided not to send it into a 'foreign' trip or for a super difficult task, but just to test it on the 'old object,' which we shoot before but only with photos. (Navalny, 2018b)

Even based on this small sample, it is evident that Navalny usually uses modern and digital technologies—when investigating the elites' purported crimes—due to their effectiveness, comparatively low cost, as well as relevance to the YouTube medium. Curating, processing and presenting the data for his investigation may require significantly more time and work on behalf of Navalny and his team—this is a characteristic constitute of IJ. The simplicity of addressing the people in these excerpts presupposes associating the narrator with the audience through the personal pronouns and nouns, as in 'superficial' populism. The discrediting attacks of the elite in

these excerpts have a personalised character and target particular people, such as the former PM Medvedev.

5.3. Radical Populism

'Radical' populism excerpts contain characteristics of citizen activism propagated by Navalny. These excerpts greatly vary in their text length within the sample: from 89 words to 1,000 words. The approximate average length of the excerpts is 400 words. The excerpts seemed to be located towards the end of his narration—emphasising the strong message or an appeal directed to 'the people.'

Most of these excerpts were connected to elections. They form a crucial part of Russia's political ecosystem, which both the ruling elite and the non-systemic opposition take seriously. Within the same electoral period in which the sample was taken, Navalny invites people to first participate and vote in elections, and then to boycott them—just as when he was barred from the 2018 election. Ironically, both calls intend to safeguard the democratic meaning of this institution.

This small sample of excerpts also contains different forms of 'offline' and 'online' calls to action. In his 'offline' call, Navalny invites people to: boycott the elections (4), go to peaceful protests (3), become observers at the elections (2), put down a signature for his nomination to the presidential elections (2), as well as other actions (1). In his 'online' call, Navalny invites people to subscribe to his YouTube channel (4), share the video (4), as well as other online actions (2). The 'offline' calls are mostly associated with political participation in elections and protests. The 'online' calls are an everyday form of digital action with political meaning which users can exercise in Russia without fear of persecution typical to the Russian regime:

Take this video with the investigation and send it to everyone, literally to everyone, post it everywhere where you can. This is our war of spreading against their blocking, and we should win in this war. Subscribe to our channel, we tell the truth here. (Navalny, 2018c)

5.4. Advocacy Populism

'Advocacy' populism excerpts are located at the intersection of digital activism and IJ. Some IJ practices can help to discredit the elite, whereas digital activism sometimes contains an appeal to 'the people,' mostly in radical forms. Advocacy populism excerpts are usually lengthy (on average 1,064 words each) and located at the end of narration, or they are full text transcripts of sole YouTube videos.

The excerpts were the following parts of investigations into the elites' corruption. They describe luxurious properties, the elites' nepotism, and provide evidence of the elite's corruption crimes. These excerpts contain el-

ements of drone journalism; enabling a birds-eye view of officials' otherwise inaccessible properties. This has a dramatic effect on YouTube users, who in all likelihood have not seen this footage on any mainstream formats in Russia.

However, Navalny does not only engage YouTube users in his investigative story—he wants his audience to act. He motivates people to act both 'online' and 'offline' in these excerpts:

> On the 28th of January, I urge you all to participate in the protest action in your city. Not for me, not about me, but to protect your own right to participate in the country's life, the right at least once in six-year time to ask from the authorities: 'So where did you, bastards take our oil money?' Subscribe to our channel—we tell the truth here. (Navalny, 2018d)

Some of his efforts, for example, the investigation into the PM's corruption—his most popular video with 30 million views (in June 2020)—led to mass protests organised by Navalny in Russia in 2017. Interestingly, the concentration of released videos with advocacy excerpts occurred before and during these protests. Navalny published his investigation about the former PM on March 2, 2017, which itself consisted of two advocacy excerpts. Then, from this date until June 15, 2017, he published a further five videos with 'advocacy' excerpts. During this time period, Navalny organised two major anti-corruption protests connected with the investigation on March 26 and June 12 in the same year, which were claimed to be the biggest protests since those occurring in 2011–2012 (Pinchuk & Shurmina, 2017).

In sum, there is a strong and substantive message in these parts of the videos which contains several calls to action, general and personalised attacks of the elite, and evidence of elitist corruption crimes collected through IJ practices—which not only motivate people to act 'online' but sometimes can potentially encourage people to participate in real, physical protests (as was seen in 2017).

6. Conclusion

This research has illuminated some of the major communication strategies that non-systemic opposition representatives use to stay 'afloat' in the autocratic political environment and to overcome political censorship and limited media freedom. From a broader perspective, the analysis of Navalny's communication helps researchers to determine whether there is 'luft' (from German 'air') for spreading anti-establishment discourses in censored Russian PC, and discern what communication strategies types of non-systemic opposition in Russia favour its fight for survival in the public sphere.

In Russia's current political climate where dissident elements of society are silenced, threatened, harassed, or even eliminated, Navalny's project marks a unique change of pace in Russian opposition history in the last

decade. Many of his anti-corruption colleagues in the 2010s, who were active online in this area, disappeared from the Russian public sphere due to harassment (Etling et al., 2010; Knobel & Sanders, 2012).

In Navalny's case, we see the use of digital populist communication strategies to challenge Putin's elite, which has held power for 20 years. Navalny's opposition populism has distinctive features within Russian populism in particular, and populism in general—combining IJ and digital activism practices in his narration. Navalny's populist style not only demonstrates evidence of the elite's crimes but also invites citizens to participate in politics. Sometimes people react to this call, as was seen in protests of 2017 inspired by Navalny's YouTube documentary. By providing his audience with a variety of political actions in his narration, he shows pathways to political change in a country usually resistant to them. Some of the pathways are easy to implement with one click, while others involve 'physical' political actions.

YouTube's status as the most popular social media platform in Russia (Statista, 2019) provides Navalny with a space for his anti-establishment sentiments. The platform seems to negotiate with censorship and regulatory bodies. Therefore, it can leave space for anti-corruption investigations such as Navalny's. For instance, it did not delete Navalny's major resonant investigations, and these are still available to YouTube users (Agora, 2019). In so doing, YouTube aids the preservation of anti-corruption and anti-establishment discourses in Russia.

Navalny's narration on YouTube is consonant with the notion of cyber-populism (Gerbaudo, 2017). Navalny is a populist who claims a "bottom-up recuperation and reclamation of democracy and political institutions by ordinary citizens" (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 485). He offers a more authentic political participation than the ruling elite allows. His communication brings diversity to a public sphere monopolised by pro-government discourses. His videos are highly viewed, accessible, and can be easily shared via the platform.

It is still doubtful and requires further investigation, whether his discourse can bring about the long-lasting realisation of protest potential in Russia. Having witnessed the tragic impact of revolutions in the last century, and more specifically political and economic crises in the 1990s, the Russian people became increasingly hesitant to participate in protests with economic (1998–2018) or political (2009–2018) demands in the following two decades, according to Levada's (2020) survey. Despite the noticeable intensification of protest potential in the last three years (Levada, 2020), the establishment—afraid of protests and radical changes to the political system—has also been effective in countering the protests. The introduction of restrictive laws on mass gatherings as in 2012, the administrative bans on local protests, or the mass arrests and harassment of protesters (including Navalny himself) continue to hamper the coherence and mass character of Russia's protest movement.

Navalny has since become an example for other activists—mostly his associates—to resist authoritarian rule, activate the mobilising potential of citizens, and advocate their political rights. This was evident during the 2019 protests surrounding Moscow's municipal election. Three of Navalny's associates—Sobol, Yashin, and Zhdanov—were barred from registration in the election, and organised mass protests in Moscow using digital instruments as part of their repertoire. Previously, it was shown that his associates used the same visual style as Navalny in their YouTube videos (Glazunova, 2020). The events of this kind require further investigation into activists' narrations, to better assess the applicability of Navalny's populist template within the broader phenomenon of Russian non-systemic opposition.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

Agora. (2018). Svoboda Interneta 2017: polzuchaya kriminalizatsiya [The freedom of the Internet 2017: Slithering criminalization]. *Agora*. Retrieved from https://www.agora.legal/articles/Doklad-Mezhdunarodnoi-Agory-«Svoboda-interneta-2017-polzuchaya-kriminalizaciya»/11

Agora. (2019). Doklad mezdunarodnoi Agory 2018; Svoboda interneta 2018: delegirovanie repressii [The report of International Agora: The freedom of the Internet and delegation of the repression]. *Agora*. Retrieved from https://agora.legal/articles/Doklad-Mezhdunarodnoi-Agory-«Svoboda-interneta-2018-delegirovanie-repressiy»/18

Appelgren, E., & Nygren, G. (2014). Data journalism in Sweden: Introducing new methods and genres of journalism into 'old' organizations. *Digital Journalism*, *2*(3), 394–405. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.884344

Becker, J. (2004). Lessons from Russia: A neo-authoritarian media system. *European Journal of Communication*, *19*(2), 139–163.

Blumler, J. G. (2013). The fourth age of political communication: Keynote address delivered at a Workshop on Political Communication Online, the Free University of Berlin, September 12. *Scribd*. Retrieved from https://www.scribd.com/document/337580226/Blumler-The-Fourth-Age-of-Political-Communication-2013

Bonikowski, B., & Gidron, N. (2016). The populist style in American politics: Presidential campaign discourse, 1952–1996. *Social Forces*, *94*(4), 1593–1621. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sov120

Burgess, J., & Green, J. (2018). *YouTube: Online video and participatory culture* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Carson, A. (2019). *Investigative journalism, democracy and the digital age*. New York, NY: Routledge.

De Burgh, H. (2008). *Investigative journalism*. Abingdon: Routledge.

de Vreese, C. H., Esser, F., Aalberg, T., Reinemann, C., & Stanyer, J. (2018). Populism as an expression of political communication content and style: A new perspective. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *23*(4), 423–438. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161218790035

Engesser, S., Ernst, N., Esser, F., & Büchel, F. (2017). Populism and social media: How politicians spread a fragmented ideology. *Information, Communication & Society*, *20*(8), 1109–1126. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1207697

Etling, B., Alexanyan, K., Kelly, J., Farris, F., & Gasser, U. (2010). Public discourse in the Russian blogosphere: Mapping RuNet politics and mobilization. *The Berkman Center for Internet and Society Research Publication Series*. Retrieved from http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:8789613

Ettema, J. S., & Glasser, T. L. (1984). *On the epistemology of investigative journalism*. Paper presented at the 67th Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Gainesville, FL.

Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and power*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

FOM. (2018). Kak chasto I zachem lyudi smotryat televisor [How often and why people watch TV]. *FOM*. Retrieved from https://fom.ru/SMI-i-internet/14029

Gel'man, V. (2013). Cracks in the wall: Challenges to electoral authoritarianism in Russia. *Problems of Post-Communism*, *60*(2), 3–10.

Gel'man, V. (2015). Political opposition in Russia: A troubled transformation. *Europe-Asia Studies*, *67*(2), 177–191. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2014.1001577

Gerbaudo, P. (2017). From cyber-autonomism to cyber-populism: An ideological history of digital activism. *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, *15*(2), 477–489.

Gerbaudo, P. (2018). Social media and populism: An

elective affinity? *Media, Culture & Society*, *40*(5), 745–753. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443718772 192

Glazunova, S. (2020). *Digital media as a tool for non-systemic opposition in Russia: A case study of Alexey Navalny's populist communication on YouTube* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia.

Houston, B. (2010). The future of investigative journalism. *Daedalus*, *139*(2), 45–56. https://doi.org/10.1162/daed.2010.139.2.45

Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2016). *Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: Economic have-nots and cultural backlash* (Harvard Kennedy School Faculty Research Working Paper Series). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School. Retrieved from https://research.hks.harvard.edu/publications/workingpapers/Index.aspx

Jacobs, K., Sandberg, L., & Spierings, N. (2019). *Twitter and Facebook: Populists' double-barrelled gun?* Paper presented at the International Communication Association, Washington, DC.

Jagers, J., & Walgrave, S. (2007). Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties' discourse in Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research*, *46*(3), 319–345. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00690.x

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, *53*(1), 59–68.

Knobel, B., & Sanders, J. (2012). Samizdat 2.0: The Dymovsky case and the use of streaming video as a political tool in Contemporary Russia. *International Journal of E-Politics*, *3*(1), 26–41.

Kolesnikov, A., Kortunov, A., & Snegovaya, M. (2018). Ssha, Evropa, Rossiya: Takie raznye populizmy [USA, Europe, Russia: Such different populisms]. *Carnegie*. Retrieved from http://carnegie.ru/2018/05/21/ru-event-6896

Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Krippendorff, K. (2012). *Content Analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Laclau, E. (2005). *On populist reason*. London: Verso.

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and social strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Verso.

Levada. (2017). Protesty i Navalny [Protests and Navalny]. *Levada*. Retrieved from https://www.levada.ru/2017/07/17/protesty-i-navalnyj

Levada. (2020). Otsenka tekuschego polozheniya del v strane [The assessment of current situation in the country]. *Levada*. Retrieved from https://www.levada.ru/indikatory/polozhenie-del-v-strane

McNair, B. (2011). *An introduction to political communication* (5th ed.). Abingdon: Routledge.

Moffitt, B., & Tormey, S. (2014). Rethinking populism: Politics, mediatisation and political style. *Political Studies*, *62*(2), 381–397.

Mudde, C. (2004). The populist zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, *39*(4), 541–563. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x

Navalny, A. (2018a, May 6). *Navalnyi ob aktsii 5-go maya* [Navalny about the rally on the 5th of May] [Video file]. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/jnjSquL9cW8

Navalny, A. (2018b, March 6). *Dvorets na kotoryi zapreshcheno smotret* [The palace that we cannot look at] [Video file]. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/rbRoZyuOijk

Navalny, A. (2018c, February 12). *Rassledovanie objavleno zapretnym* [The investigation declared forbidden] [Video file]. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/Jv0fp5KpKhs

Navalny, A. (2018d, January 15). *A kudadeis nashi neftyanye dengi?* [Where did our oil money go?] [Video file]. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/fLhYofZ1SLk

Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., & Nielsen, R. K. (2019). *Reuters Institute digital news report 2019*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Retrieved from https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/DNR_2019_FINAL.pdf

Pauwels, T. (2011). Measuring populism: A quantitative text analysis of party literature in Belgium. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, *21*(1), 97–119. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2011.539483

Pinchuk, D., & Shurmina, N. (2017, March 26). Russian police detain opposition leader, hundreds of protesters. *Reuters*. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-protests-idUSKBN16X0G8

Rai, S. M. (2015). Political performance: A framework for analysing democratic politics. *Political Studies*, *63*(5), 1179–1197.

Repnikova, M. (2018). Contesting the state under authoritarianism: Critical journalists in China and Russia. *Comparative Politics*, *51*(1), 41–60.

Repucci, S. (2019). Freedom and the media: A downward spiral. *Freedom House*. Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-media/freedom-media-2019

Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F. (2014). *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Schrape, J. F. (2016). Social media, mass media and the 'public sphere': Differentiation, complementarity and co-existence (SOI Discussion Paper 2016-01). Stuttgart: University of Stuttgart. Retrieved from https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/48295

Social Psychology Network. (n.d.). Homepage. *Research Randomizer*. Retrieved from https://www.randomizer.org

Spaiser, V., Chadefaux, T., Donnay, K., Russmann, F., & Helbing, D. (2017). Communication power struggles on social media: A case study of the 2011–12 Russian protests. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, *14*(2), 132–153.

Statista. (2019). Most used social media platforms in Russia as of third quarter of 2019, by penetration rate. *Statista*. Retrieved from https://www.statista.com/statistics/284447/russia-social-network-penetration/

Stetka, V., & Örnebring, H. (2013). Investigative journalism in Central and Eastern Europe: Autonomy, business models, and democratic roles. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *18*(4), 413–435. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161213495921

Sumiala, J. M., & Tikka, M. (2013). Broadcast yourself-global news! A netnography of the 'Flotilla' news on YouTube: Broadcast yourself-global news! *Communication, Culture & Critique*, *6*(2), 318–35. https://doi.org/10.1111/cccr.12008

Waisbord, S., & Amado, A. (2017). Populist communication by digital means: Presidential Twitter in Latin America. *Information, Communication & Society*, *20*(9), 1330–1346. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1328521

White, S., & McAllister, I. (2014). Did Russia (nearly) have a Facebook revolution in 2011? Social media's challenge to authoritarianism. *Politics*, *34*(1), 72–84.

About the Author

Sofya Glazunova is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Digital Media Research Centre at the Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia. She specialises in political communication, Russian politics, digital media, and misinformation, as well as alternative and investigative journalism. In her postdoctoral research, she focuses on how pro-government media outlets adapt to a global digital environment and utilise instruments of propaganda via social media.

Article

American Muslim Character Cancellation: Framing Engagement through the Sphere of Deviance

Jibril Latif

Department of Mass Communications and Media, Gulf University for Science and Technology, 32093 Hawally, Kuwait;
E-Mail: latif.j@gust.edu.kw

Abstract
While freedom of religion is constitutionally safeguarded in the United States, practice and expression thereof are modulated by apparatuses exhorting both ethnic and faith communities to flatten into expedient caricatures. The 'moderate Muslim' caricature is contingently acknowledged as a victim of animus thereby expected to unquestioningly advance state objectives. American Muslim scholars consequentially maintain a vigilant wariness of state engagement, sentiments further intensified when Donald Trump came to power. With the Trump regime's perilous track record, Muslims willing to engage the federal government during the initial term were expectedly criticized. Situating the American Muslim communal consultation process (*al-shūrā*), this article analyzes 100 opinion editorials responding to the Department of State's formation of the Commission on Unalienable Rights in 2019, and its inclusion of a recognizable Muslim scholar as commissioner. For disparate reasons, editorials authored by critical communal voices formulated a perceived consensus against any engagement with the regime whatsoever, suggesting self-censoring expressive parameters and balkanization. Using Daniel Hallin's sphere of deviance, findings indicate that amidst increased expectations for religious leaders to be more accessible and accommodating, communal consultation on political issues broke down in the virtual spaces the scholar's critics inhabited whilst his own public relations messaging operated with discernable ambivalence. Findings further suggest that as American Muslims increasingly identify with the social justice language of the far-left, communal thought leaders' racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds disproportionately factor into how their words and engagements are interpreted and tolerated.

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Freedom of Expression, Democratic Discourse and the Social Media" edited by Maria Elliot (Linnaeus University, Sweden) and Kristoffer Holt (Linnaeus University, Sweden).

1. Transcending Black and White Discourse Boundaries

During comedy sketches, Dave Chapelle can wantonly use the N-word with seemingly unlimited license. In fact, wielding it as a prop he generates ample laughter and applause from white audiences allowed to laugh, but never allowed to retell. When Chappelle's 2019 Netflix special *Sticks & Stones* was initially awarded a 0% rating on *Rotten Tomatoes* because progressive critics with exclusive voting rights were offended by his risqué jokes on the social accommodation of mutable sexuality as iden-

tity in which he called gender dysphoria crazy, under the aegis of their rubric, Chappelle was being labeled a deviant (Hasan, 2019). Is the N-word tolerable whilst conventional appraisal of gender ideology is not? Luckily for Chappelle, it was a hurdle overcome in irony once 40,000 audience members were allowed to democratize the audience rating, shooting the score up to 99% overnight (Hasan, 2019). This anecdote suggests that the rubric governing discourse parameters disproportionately arbitrates these peculiar and distinct freedoms of expression. How much are these licenses rooted in shifting

moralities and views of history? Could Chapelle have as narrowly escaped cancellation if his critique had been openly informed by his private personal conviction in Islam? Philosopher Christopher Tollefsen makes a similar critique about gender dysphoria without the punchlines, using the slightly more benign and clinical word choices "mental illness" and "pathology," but detractors almost inextricably cite his identity markers—*white*, *male* and *Christian*—in ad hominem rebuttals against Tollefson's arguments for sensible traditional morality in society (Tollefsen, 2015). Therefore, it seems identification as an oppressed minority wields a pathos-laden license not necessarily extended to an individual who identifies with the truth claims of his or her religion, and vice versa. In such an environment, theologians guarding tradition must tread carefully. This sentiment echoes when a well-recognized American Muslim theologian and public intellectual, Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Hanson, tells a largely Christian audience at the Field Museum in Chicago during philosopher Alvin Plantinga's retirement celebration:

> Given the suspicion, even the disdain among a lot of intellectual and educated people about theology, I sometimes hesitate when people ask me 'what do you teach?' to say theology because it's a little bit like saying I practice alchemy or I study unicorns. (Hanson, 2017)

Awkward boundaries function as discourse markers that influence and govern our ever-shifting freedoms of expression in public and communal spaces, and exploring them alerts us to the expected societal recourse of *who* can say *what* from which epistemic perspective. Throughout history, many have been allowed to conveniently dismiss how America's original sins of genocide and racial oppression still impact present-day expressive boundaries, but the filming and media circulation of extrajudicial police killings in 2020 brought about another round of protests and uncomfortable national discussions on racial ideology. Back in the 1990s, a time when black Americans would often change their names with zeal after converting to Islam, in both a cognitive disassociation to the name of their ancestors' slave-owners and the liberation that self-identification establishes, basketball star Chris Jackson became Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf mid-career. Citing his religious understanding as the basis for his refusal to stand for the National Anthem, his right to free speech was, ostensibly, legally protected, yet he was consequentially framed in the media as an unpatriotic ingrate who had committed the seditious act of becoming Muslim; he received death threats, had his home burned to the ground, and found himself out of the league in short order despite being one of the all-time great shooters (Chopra, 2018). In more recent times, the sports figure Colin Kaepernick similarly attempted such a protest and found himself out of football thereafter. We can similarly intuit what the outrage would have been if Kaepernick—who is biracial, but considered *black* in the United States—linked his cause to a public commitment to Islam. Despite expressed desire to keep his personal convictions a private matter, the dark web similarly labeled him a Muslim for having a Muslim companion. How can we better understand this? For one, the label *Muslim* has served as an epithet since the country's founding, and while Muslims are generally bound by theology, the antecedents of race in America have fluidly moved discursively between religion, culture and biology (Milani, 2014). Moreover, in the current zeitgeist, pervasive anti-Muslim sentiments enable the media and political apparatuses to regularly flatten Muslims into inescapable caricatures. State-funded initiatives, like the controversial Countering Violent Extremism program and its documented history of entrapment, suggest that good and moderate Muslims are to assume essentializing roles as contingently protected victims of Muslim animus thereby expected to unquestioningly aid the state in problematic initiatives (Shaikh, 2019).

Islam is still the fastest growing religion in the country, especially in downtrodden communities and prisons, with estimates wildly ranging from 3 to 15 million adherents, but because of its associated social stigma many American Muslims understandably keep their religious commitments sequestered, woefully leaving the abject caricatures unchallenged (Lipka, 2017). Consequentially, this all serves to perpetuate the privation of American Muslim social capital in the public sphere. President Barack Obama—another Christian epithetically tagged as Muslim—affirmed that "Muslim-Americans are our friends and our neighbors, our co-workers, our sports heroes," to which Donald Trump responded on Twitter: "Obama said in his speech that Muslims are our sports heroes. What sport is he talking about, and who? Is Obama profiling?" (Borchers, 2015). During his 2016 candidacy, Trump politically mobilized festering Muslim animus with sophistic pronouncements such as "Islam hates us" and once in office, the rhetoric and policies proved unremitting. Despite his conceptual usage being consistently and vapidly incorrect, as Islam is not a proper noun, Trump's demagogic ploys framed Muslims with a diminution of dignity that may be likened to what has been perpetuated against the black community. Although likening one grievance to another typically portends fallacious reasoning, evidenced by intersectional movements that appropriate the history of racial struggles to advance ideological agendas on gender and sexuality, it is critical to refrain from summarily dismissing how the combination of racial and religious identities work in the American context where unapologetic and dynamic black American Muslims like Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Warith Deen Mohammed and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar brought Islam into the American consciousness. It is both an epic tale of how hard-fought social capital was gained and also a tragic tale of how it was thereafter squandered, a situation aggravated by intercommunal contestation over authority tied to race. Timothy Daniels (2019, p. 66) frames abiding intercommunal tensions as a lack

of "respectful and principled relationships" between indigenous and immigrant communities, acknowledging a binary in how black American Muslims were supplanted in representation and authority by immigrant Muslim communities that appeared in large numbers after immigration reform in 1965; it is the thesis Sherman Jackson (2005) has outlined, an evolution of frayed relationships as binary chronologies critical to understanding the cultural and ideological trajectories of today's fragmentation. Jackson further argues that irreconciliation with black suffering abides as a key issue of contestation on authority amongst American Muslims (Jackson, 2009).

Nevertheless, as miscegenation and indigenization occur, black and white boundaries become less able to provide a totalizing picture of today's communal dynamics. Ideology and first principles more appropriately explain that division. While a few Muslims do receive coverage in the public sphere, the obscured caveat is that they must almost exclusively use the framework laid down by political progressives, exemplified by the sneering political satire Netflix allows Hasan Minhaj, the smutty comedy Hulu allows Ramy, or the conditional advocacy the far-left offers Linda Sarsour's version of intersectional activism. In juxtaposition, Hanson operates within a classical anti-nominalist perspective that affirms traditional realities now deemed offensive to some, such as hierarchies, while maintaining a voracious reading appetite akin to the late Harold Bloom's and a honed gift of persuasive oratory that combines vast amounts of seemingly disparate perspectives into theological sermons. It was this generational ability that catapulted him into the public spotlight in the 1990s. For brevity, we can pinpoint one encapsulating example from 2004, when Hanson spoke in front of Shakespearean scholars at London's Globe Theatre and proposed an anagogical reading of Othello's Iago as Santiago de Mato Moros (James the Moor slayer), the personification of evil as Conquistadores who had driven Muslims out of Spain instead of promoting *La Convivencia* (coexistence). Culturally attenuated erudition able to offer metaphysical conceits and new readings of Shakespeare, whilst also masterfully navigating the Qur'an, is a rare ascent that impresses many westerners, especially Muslims. However, there are both opportunities and perils in how this capacity resonates with non-Muslim audiences comprised largely of white, Christian conservatives with elite educations who welcome a moderate presentation that amalgamates east and west out of a shared concern for the plight of traditional mores in society, and the encroachment of secularism. Naturally, when philosopher Alvin Plantiga's retirement ceremony was hosted by the John Templeton foundation in 2017, Hanson was selected as perhaps the solitary Muslim scholar qualified to deliver an address acknowledging Plantiga's contributions and those of other Christian philosophers like G. K. Chesterton, another encapsulation reinforcing why he is celebrated in conservative circles for arguing the continued relevance of reasonable faith in the public sphere:

People today…glibly dismiss belief in God as inherently unreasonable, and yet they'll say 'I don't believe in God' without ever looking at some of the arguments. The same people, however, will believe in things like quarks and neutrinos; they'll believe in dark matter and they won't know the science that substantiates belief in those things. They simply trust the scientists that believe in such phenomena that we can't see. We have theologians also that have their arguments for believing in the things that they don't see. Just like most people believe in scientists without really knowing their proofs, many believers, simple people, believe what their teachers and their philosophers tell them without having their proofs. So, we forget that the age of science is also an age of faith. Just like the age of faith, was actually also an age of science. And, something that we forget is that the epistemology of trust is foundational in our world. (Hanson, 2017)

In 2019, Hanson was appointed as a commissioner on the Department of State's Commission on Unalienable Rights, which convened under the aegis of President Trump's Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo. The engagement was controversial to American Muslims who are generally split on how to value contingent acknowledgment from the dominant culture. Because no matter how assimilated or integrated descendants of Muslim immigrants become, Shakespeare cannot become part of their cultural heritage; moreover, critical voices argue that they should check the impulse present among communal members who myopically seek asymmetrical validation, questioning whether it is worth their community's top scholars having to, as they see it, fit the mold of a conservative Catholic theologian in order to sit at the table. Unquestionably, some are ultracrepidarians with axes to grind, however, others comprise former supporters and donors perplexed by the optics of recent engagements with no real access to dialogue or nuanced explanation. Indicating a perceived communal consensus against engagement with the Trump administration, vocal critics found a synergy on the issue despite promoting disparate ends. In that light, this article examines shifting boundaries of expression as they pertain to the American Muslim community by surveying opinion editorials written in response to Hanson's appointment.

2. Interpretive Audiences: Trained and Untrained Interpreters

In the study of religions, an important distinction exists in the bifurcation of the normative and descriptive approaches. As authoritative interpreters of normative tradition, theologians must equip themselves with the tools needed for navigating scriptures and communicating them effectively to audiences. What modern audiences in turn do with such messages as they are filtered through cultural matrices is perhaps more indicative of

culture than intrinsic representation of Islam itself. For centuries, Muslims have congregated in sacred spaces while observing hierarchical dynamics deferentially binding congregants to scholars in acknowledgment that intellect and decades of demanding training in the tradition, its scripture and concomitant sacerdotal languages, its spiritual sciences, and its sacred law are prerequisites that deem scholars esteemed inheritors of the prophets. On the other hand, Muslims emphasize scholarly fallibility and engage in consultative interaction (*al-shūrā*) in a symbiosis that forces scholars to attenuate their diktats to each zeitgeist. Epistemically, of course, there are differences between the first principles and processes that dominate western-conceptualized democratic processes, but researchers have also noted tremendous overlaps (Bulliet, 2004).

In the classical context, an archetypal Muslim scholar was an erudite polymath possessing the advantages of access to knowledge, rarefied mastery, and the freedom to offer declarative statements with little fear of reprisal due to the financial and political independence the *waqf* endowment system provided. Such myriad advantages very often precluded the possibility of decentering dialogues between lay congregants and scholars, whereas today widespread functional literacy and the diffuse proliferation of knowledge perplex theologians who thereby struggle to maintain the primacy of religious scripture amid rapidly changing societal norms. In the traditional Muslim world, post-colonial traumas have contributed to a concomitant communal crisis of authority and ethics. As a result, Muslim scholars today are largely politically snarled and financially hamstrung (Tripp, 2006). The distinctive emergent perceptions complicate American Muslim dynamics when those from the traditional Muslim world arrive on America's shores and interject post-colonial notions of Islam and politics into local discussions in unawareness of complex local histories.

Furthermore, the blurring of lines between laity and scholarship allows for the unqualified to maintain platforms feigning as authorities, a decentering that social media heavily exacerbates. Online influencers, community activists, and woke Muslims trained in secular critical methods, yearning for certain progressive readings of scripture, seek to expeditiously democratize interpretation in ways that displace the role of traditional scholarship. Analogously, reader response theory popularized by Stanley Fish (2001) has recently dominated the interpretive landscape of poetry; hence, to read John Milton in a university class is often to read through a heuristic lens that similarly decenters authorial intent and meaning. John Mullan (2001) points out how it is neither impartial nor insignificant that Fish's coterie declares "no principles" or that "there is no truth, only fancy argument," and questions why readers should accept guides that unrelentingly aim at wrestling texts to their own cause. Correspondingly, interpretive religious scholars are increasingly reduced to ceremonial conductors of weddings or funerals and told to stay in their lane and out of secular life, especially politics.

3. Shifting Political Consensus

A shifting political consensus also disfavors the licenses of expression extended to theologians because American Muslims were principally political conservatives before 9/11, whereas a stagger leftward was thereafter engendered by the copious presence of anti-Muslim ideologies on the right such as neoconservatism and Zionism, and the perceptibly higher levels of external empathy and accommodation displayed by some on the left. Thus, today most American Muslims self-identify as principally liberal even though a practicing Muslim has more shared virtue interests with traditional conservatism (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017). *The Economist* ("Why American Muslims," 2019) observes the end of a time when nearly 50% of votes went to Republicans (now 11%), and the patterned emergence of progressive Muslim politicians like Keith Ellison, Rashida Tlaib, and Ilhan Omar as a reflection of shifting ideological landscapes. Muslims now mostly lean towards the most far-left wing of the Democratic Party. In contrast, Hanson chooses to dialogue with embattled conservatives who—like the late Roger Scruton—espouse conservatism as looking first at what is right in the world and setting out to conserve it, rather than seeking out first what is wrong in the world and endeavoring to fix it. Both readings have their textual support from exegetical commentaries, but what appears rare about this particular age is the disappearance of a line that opposing communal parties agree not to cross out of respect, where attacks do not become malicious or personal. Hanson, who co-founded Zaytuna College with Zaid Shakir and Hatim Bazian, was acknowledged for a long duration as the most influential scholar of Islam in the west, but as communities adopt different visions of the world, influence shifts. For instance, in both 2016 and 2020 the *Los Angeles Times* covered the remarkable American Muslim support for progressive Senator Bernie Sanders, citing Imam Omar Suleiman, a voice for activist-minded adherents that prioritizes their specific political concerns: "Muslims are progressive on issues like healthcare, immigration, criminal justice reform, climate change. There is also concern about militarism, there's concern about Israel and Palestine, and if Muslims will have their civil liberties" (Kaleem, 2019). Demonstrative of the trend, many of Hanson's longtime students and colleagues, including Bazian, supported the group Bay Area Muslims for Bernie, and when Sanders dropped out and endorsed Joe Biden, most community members followed suit.

Hanson initially shared in his community's castigation of Trump by publicly criticizing him, but he has also demonstrated a willingness to engage each successive administration in a principled nonpartisan manner (Kaleem, 2019). While engagement was questioned less during the Obama administration's tenure because the

regime made discernable attempts to engage Muslims at public events like the annual White House iftar, the foreign policy of annexing Palestine and drone striking Muslim lands was no less problematic. Therefore, it seems to be with an even hand that back in June of 2016, when Trump was still the Republican nominee, Hanson critically remarked to *CNN*: "He's playing a dangerous game, and a lot of lives are threatened by that type of saber-rattling. We're in an extremely volatile situation and social media has introduced an unprecedented element that we don't fully understand" (Yusuf, 2016a). Then, days after Trump won the election Hanson somberly blogged:

> I still did not believe that a man, who appeared to publicly mimic a reporter's palsy, labeled Mexican migrants rapists and criminals, and, in the most explicit language, boasted of groping women, could ever be elected president—not in the United States, surely. Well, I was wrong. (Yusuf, 2016b)

As an unofficial ambassador, Hanson attempted to assuage tangible communal fears that an internment of Muslims was "highly unlikely," reassuring readers that the visible racist and violent backlash was only "a fringe element" (Yusuf, 2016b). He tried to humanize the "good-hearted people who voted for Trump" and discouraged responding with fear and despair:

> Now is the time to realize that we have too much work to do, not protesting, not lighting fires, not saying, 'Trump is not my president.' He is, and that is how our system works: by accepting the results and moving on. (Yusuf, 2016b)

For Hanson, avoiding perpetual protest entailed continuing to foster interfaith consensus building with conservatives, many of whom were in the 'never Trump' camp themselves. As the scion of a notable family from Marin County, California, his immersion in the western canon, including training in medicine and various religious traditions all compliment four decades of training in Islam. Sharing both culture with conservatives and interests, such as fighting against pornography and religious persecution, Hanson's alliances culminated into stalwart conservative recommendations for his appointment on the federal commission as one of the rarely equipped Muslim intellectuals in America suited to debate policy recommendations on fundamental human rights as situated by natural law. However, Hanson's post-election blog post would be one of his last for the next several years, which would prove pivotal from a public relations perspective that necessitates maintaining channels of symmetric dialogue with communal stakeholders. In December 2016, Hanson was embroiled in the first of several successively aggregating controversies. In front of 25,000 Muslims (and several influential Christian pastors) in Toronto, progressive journalist Mehdi Hassan equated Islamophobia

with racism and asked Hanson pointblank if he regretted not endorsing Black Lives Matter (BLM). By that time, discerning people, and most conservatives, had come to share concerns about the particular Marxist ideological orientation and intersectional queer identity politics that undergird the incorporated BLM platform called Black Lives Matter Foundation, Inc. and its radical calls for the destruction of heteronormativity and the nuclear family, as well as its antagonism towards law enforcement. The situation called for the tall order of acknowledging and critiquing the prevalence of unarmed black men being terrorized by police, while simultaneously humanizing police offers and maintaining opposition to the specific agenda of Black Lives Matter, Inc. without shirking the importance of racial equality. However, whisked off of an international flight and thrust on stage by conference organizers, an exhausted Hanson seemed caught off guard by the question and blundered by responding with decontextualized racial crime statistics instead of first assuaging communal concerns with typically measured nuance. When the response lacked methodical precision, it provided an opening for detractors to call him a racist. This prompted him to deliver an apology in which he historically situated the disintegration of the black family and successive erosion of religious morality as the primary threats to black Americans. However, to ideologues invested in accusing him of dismissing structural injustices, this analysis incensed them even further. In the escalation on social media both detractors and former associates excoriated him, claiming that white privilege purportedly precluded his ability to offer objective observations on racial matters (Latif, 2018). With his intentions and decades of public service being questioned, Hanson was visibly pained and subsequently stopped blogging, and thereafter all of his administrator-run social media accounts were also closed down in early 2017. Thereafter, the dialogue between supporters and critics essentially broke down. Throughout this entire ordeal, Hanson was reductively framed as an archetypal and out of touch white male, which ostensibly made him part of the problem.

Intensifying factional disagreements in the aftermath was a lack of symmetric dialogue and access. Locating and tracing the evolution of Hanson's opinions is actually quite a challenge. For one, the transient economic infrastructure underpinning the 1990s and 2000s nascent Muslim speaking circuit resulted in disparate entities owning copyrights to popular speakers' talks and intellectual contributions. Furthermore, most of Hanson's most important statements have been made at informal conferences under the pretenses that they are to be public communal addresses, as is the case with talks he previously delivered annually in Toronto; however, recordings are rarely ever released, nor are agenda, minutes, summaries or transcripts. Therefore, when detractors debate his supporters online, there is no recourse to an official catalogue or directory of his chronicled positions. Another point of criticism is his inaccessibility to

the wider community outside of an inner circle, which some may or may not reassess when weighing factors such as administrative demands and security concerns. Moreover, Hanson's most notable lessons have been delivered at summer retreats at global sites where attendance is contingent on a selectively screened application process and attendance fee, the videos of which sometimes appear catalogued many months or years later on a subscription-based streaming service called Deenstream with expressed copyright. Like many popular speakers, Hanson's content is pirated from the Deenstream livestream feed by unofficial accounts that subsequently flood YouTube and other platforms with small clips relabeled by uploaders with provocative titles intended to garner clicks. In the stead of internally curated and titled video clips, the pirated and mislabeled clips are regularly forwarded on social media pages, including those of Hanson's colleagues at Zaytuna College, an ambiguous public relations message softly signaling a laissez faire tolerance towards continued copyright infringement.

This brief situation analysis, in which abiding contestations were further obfuscated by the communicative transmission process, partially contextualizes the critical outrage expressed when the State Department named Hanson as commissioner on the Commission on Unalienable Rights in early July 2019 because critics already shared cognitive reference points for framing Hanson's recent actions within a consecutive sequence of misjudgments. Therefore, with his personal blogging ceased, no personal social media engagement, and no detectable institutional public relations tactics to preempt the community with a statement of rationale, Hanson's detractors consequentially produced numerous critiques during July and August of 2019 that formulated a perceptible media consensus that stood essentially unchallenged thereafter. Furthermore, Hanson declined numerous offers to comment with mainstream outlets seeking clarification, leaving guidance for interested community members in short supply.

4. Methodology and Data

For many, Edward R. Murrow's 1954 condemnation of Senator Joseph McCarthy's allegation that communists and Soviet spies had infiltrated government and industry serves as a historical marker, a moment when morally compelled objective observers pivoted out of journalistic descriptivism into morally conscientious prescriptivism. Situating political media history, David Mindich likens the ascendancy of the Trump administration to a Murrow moment in part of his larger criticism that American audiences are increasingly less informed voters who make decisions based on slogans and that voicing a subjective opinion on the administration can severely polarize a person's public persona, thereby discouraging voices from exercising their freedom of expression (Mindich, 2016). A suggested heuristic for conceptualizing this phenomenon is a journalistic analysis of contested dialogues

about the Vietnam War. Daniel Hallin (1986) utilized media framing to describe how communities receive information, dividing public opinion into three parts within the opinion corridor: the sphere of consensus where writers can invoke what are considered shared assumptions, the sphere of legitimate controversy that forces interlocutors to attempt editorial objectivity, and the sphere of deviance whereby interlocutors feel authorized in censoring ideas deemed beyond the pale.

In response to the formation and announcement of the Commission on Unalienable Rights in the summer of 2019, hundreds of opinion editorial articles were published in the mainstream press. I read through them in search of an overlap in themes, and then I limited the data collection to 100 articles published within the 90-day media cycle surrounding the July 8, 2019 announcement of the commission. The overwhelming majority of articles published took a very critical stance, the themes ranging from critiques against the formation of the panel itself, to numerous allegations against its members and their stances on issues like abortion, with many going as far as alleging that the panel had an ulterior motive to advance Christian fundamentalism at the policy level. As these themes dominated the corpus, I included articles in the data collection from *The Washington Post*, *Politico*, *The New York Times*, *Reuters*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Yorker*, CNN, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Nation*, *The Guardian*, *Chronicle*, *Salon*, *Al Jazeera*, and several other 'mainstream' outlets that specifically mention Hanson and generally fall under the center-left and far-left political rubric. Then, in attempting to balance the data, I ran searches for articles about the commission that praised its efforts, and found several articles published at conservative, religious and libertarian outlets such as The Cato Institute. Next, I searched for articles that kept their reporting to more descriptive accounts, which led to articles from centrist perspectives published at outlets such as *The Atlantic*. I analyzed all of the articles and categorized the arguments into themes.

In search of a method that would provide a better opportunity for this thematic analysis to materialize I conducted a cross analysis on authors in order to verify authorial connections to the Muslim community, analyzing documented publication history in Muslim communal public spaces and platforms. From this deductive method I was able to identify 40 of the articles as being authored by public figures in the American Muslim community, all of whom mentioned the inclusion of Hanson on the commission as a primary interest in their pieces. Hanson has authored numerous books and has served as editor in chief and contributor for two peer-reviewed journals: *Seasons* and *Renovatio*. After reading his extant list of publications and then close reading the critical opinion editorials, dominant themes emerged. Among authors with links to the American Muslim community, the locus of criticism about Hanson primarily utilizes distinctly progressive political modes of argumentation almost entirely devoid of theologi-

cal rationale or engagement with his publication track-record. This finding reinforced the balkanization hypothesis of discourse breaking down within communities. Coincidentally, these 40 articles were shared and discussed widely on social media platforms and private WhatsApp groups in the Muslim community (in contrast to the other 60), indicating an inner-communal impact that has remained difficult to measure. As media researchers point out, forums for debate are governed by their own type of logic, sometimes utilized as self-perceived correctives pushing back against narratives in the traditional media space deemed problematic (Holt, 2018). There is scant research investigating such discord in the American Muslim community from a media perspective, but this event was a clear example of inner communal discord (*fitnah*) becoming publicly elicited.

Therefore, using Hallin's sphere of deviance after identifying the site of contestation to the widely shared opinion editorials, I divided the 100 articles thematically into four distinct categories.

The first category comprises mainstream publications contesting the commission's mandate to examine the root bases of inalienable rights in order to advise policymakers at the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Affairs. Critics at progressive publications like *The Washington Post* fear the commission's language is code for curtailing progressive advances, or in the words of *Politico* a "counterweight to an expansive liberal view on human rights" (Toosi, 2019). Attempting to assuage such fears, Chairperson Mary Ann Glendon responded to these charges in a podcast, stating: "I would suggest that they read the charter of the commission…instead of indulging in wild speculation….It's an independent study group and it has been directed to focus on principles and not policies or specific issues" (Howell, 2019). This category contains broader criticism, including some of Hanson, not as central to the discussion, but as one in a group of purportedly threatening religious caricatures; as feminist publication *Ms. Magazine* charges: "Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Hanson sees marriage equality for LGBTIQ people as a sign of the *End Times*" (Susskind & Stern, 2019).

The second category comprises conservative and libertarian praise for the commission's initiative, such as an article by The Cato Institute suggesting: "If this new commission can refocus America's human rights thinking and policy on America's first principles, grounded in our unalienable natural rights, the implications are far reaching, not only for the rest of the world but for America itself" (Pilon, 2019). Within this category there are many positive allusions to the inclusion of a Muslim. Robert George, one of the most prominent and influential Catholics in the United States, is a persisting advocate for Hanson's inclusion, and by directive of the Second Vatican Council's interfaith initiative *Nostra Aetate* George (2019) similarly fosters dialogue on shared prerogatives:

It has been my privilege and joy to work with Muslims…in defending human life in all stages and

conditions, beginning with child in the womb; in securing religious freedom for people of all faiths; in protecting refugees from persecution and terror; in opposing pornography and human trafficking; and in upholding marriage as the union of husband and wife.

Another influential Catholic leader, Thomas S. Hibbs (2020), praises Hanson's thought in *The Dallas Morning News*: "Such a conception of religion, education and tradition may well provide a salutary counter not only to much of contemporary Islamic thought and practice; it is also an alternative to tribalistic trends in advanced Western culture." The smaller third category comprises several journalistically descriptive reports on Hanson's inclusion on the commission, such as Emma Green's (2017) piece in *The Atlantic* titled "Muslim Americans Are United by Trump-and Divided by Race." However, the fourth category comprises editorial polemics and critical pieces classified as cyber *shūrā*, dissenting statements that can be attributed to public figures in the American Muslim community who can be held accountable for their public remarks (Latif, 2018). I isolate this fourth category of approximately 40 articles for closer analysis based on their critical discourse modes. The overly descriptive nature of this method is a shortcoming, while simultaneously a benefit in its ability to isolate thematic sentiment across a spectrum of articles.

5. Cyber *Shūrā*: American Muslim Opinion Editorials

Close reading of the opinion editorials reveals long-standing embedded contestations about communal chronologies and scaffolded issues of disputation. One stretches back to when Hanson was summoned to advise the White House immediately after 9/11. Hanson deliberately spent his few minutes in the Oval Office highlighting essential verses from the Quran and imploring President George W. Bush not to launch an international war in retaliation to the acts of vigilantes. However, on the way out, Hanson excoriated the tentatively titled investigation 'Operation Infinite Justice' as blasphemous, to which Bush responded by immediately changing the name, and later, the entire scope from investigation to full-scale invasion, which infamously destroyed untold numbers of lives in Iraq and the wider region. Despite the exchange being a well-documented saga in American history, some of Hanson's detractors have falsely alleged that Hanson endorsed the actual invasion of Iraq on the mere condition of Bush's name change. Hanson later acknowledged that simply engaging the president irreparably damaged his reputation and opened the door to endless criticism and libel. This danger, of being framed as a 'moderate Muslim' caricature still looms. It has had an impact on his accessibility thereafter, as Genieve Abdo notes in her monograph on the rare occasion of being granted interview access at his California home: "Hamza Yusuf felt he had been misquoted everywhere-in newspapers, on television, and on the Internet—sometimes deliberately"

(Abdo, 2007, p. 13). All of this communally contested history is thematically embedded into the critical pieces, often intertwined with a critique of Hanson's long-standing affiliation with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a country where he studied on scholarship in the early 1980s. A congressional policy paper outlines the UAE's global political conflicts, which are particularly upsetting to many American Muslims, not only because of United States-backed UAE military involvement in countries like Yemen, but also for its publication of terror lists implicating mainstream Muslim charitable institutions in the same breath as bonified terror groups (Katzman, 2019). Furthermore, in 2018 Hanson told an interviewer at an interfaith conference in the UAE: "The Emirates, *inside* the country, this is a country committed to tolerance" (5Pillars, 2018). Despite what seemed like an attempt to qualify praise of the country with conditional intonation signaling an exclusion of its foreign policy, a transcription of the quote went viral and he was widely denounced on social media for the statement. Another uniting theme in the critiques is solidarity in resistance to Executive Order 13769 (Trump, 2017), titled "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States," which is also known colloquially as "The Muslim Ban." Also inextricably linked to race and ethnicity, Georgetown University has produced research on the ban's flaws, such as how it cites anti-Muslim conspiracy theories for justification in banning nationals from several Muslim-majority countries while ignoring how the United States has intervened militarily or otherwise in the banned countries "directly creating, or facilitating the conditions that have led to violence and political instability" (Şekerci & Crnkovich, 2019). For some Muslims, the ban is not a priority issue. But for others, engaging the administration that has implemented several iterations of the ban is beyond the pale.

Keeping the outrage these related issues engender in perspective therefore contextualizes the unfiltered indignation expressed in some online reactions by public figures, many of whom Hanson has prior associations to such as Yale professor Zareena Grewal (2019) who Tweets: "If you are willing to defend Hamza Yusuf's new low, aligning with the Trump administration as an advisor, you're no friend of mine." Similarly outraged, professor Ovamir Anjum posts on Facebook: "For nearly twenty years I bit my tongue and have not publicly ridiculed him, thinking that he is a foolish, egotistic, but harmless preacher. I was wrong" (Anjum, 2019). Commenting on the post, Imran Muneer, host of the *The Mad Mamluks* podcast says: "Everyone kept turning a blind eye to it and giving him the benefit of doubt. No more. Insha'allah (God willing)" (Anjum, 2019). These public comments on social media give context to the type of often unrestrained ire displayed in the 40 articles that specifically critique Hanson. For instance, Professor Maha Hilal's editorial (2019) on *Al Jazeera* provocatively titled "It's Time for Muslim Americans to Condemn Hamza Yusuf" mixes in thematic critique of Hanson's affiliation to the UAE.

Her ideological perspective in concluding that the commission is "clearly designed to enable anti-black, anti-women, Islamophobic and xenophobic policy decisions" as well as her labeling Hanson a 'cis white male' is indicative of the intersectional ideologies and languages used to disrupt objective and administrable descriptions of people's sex markers. However, pivoting into perhaps legally libelous territory Hilal repeats the slanderous claim that Hanson "met President George W. Bush and endorsed his decision to launch a military campaign against terrorism" (Hilal, 2019). The same defamation appears in Sam Hamad's (2019) piece in *The New Arab*, who charges "he was the only Muslim to essentially endorse George W. Bush's criminal, murderous and generally devastating War on Terror." In addition, Hamad similarly assumes the intersectional stance of accusing the commission of having an ulterior motive "to reshape the definition of 'unalienable rights' along the lines of Trump's alt-right agenda, with LGBT rights and women's reproductive rights obvious targets" (Hamad, 2019). English language Arab media sites, especially those editorially opposed to the UAE, increasingly use similar ideological language.

While malevolent attacks coalesce into the larger body of criticism, the less overtly polemical pieces bring up salient points while avoiding much of the ideological language. For instance, they give consideration to a range of issues such as the consequences of disengaging with the government for four to eight-year administrative periods, in contrast to having an American Muslim presence in rooms where impactful policy recommendations are being discussed. These critiques are embodied by Professor Khaled Beydoun's (2019) piece, "For American Muslims, Hamza Yusuf's Endorsement of Trump Is One Step Too Far," which begins by acknowledging Hanson's human rights advocacy "demonstrated time and again" for Yemen, Syria and the Rohingya before referencing Hanson's statements on Black Lives Matter in Toronto as one of the "recent precedents" that "signal a clear trajectory…toward power and away from the people." Beydoun then proceeds to pragmatically contextualize his interpretation of Hanson's perceived shift in approach:

Yusuf the spiritual and political firebrand is no more. And too many within the Muslim American and global milieus still latch onto a version and vision of Yusuf that has been replaced by a man who views power, and the most vile stewards of it, as useful channels toward improving the humanitarian conditions of Muslims around the world. (Beydoun, 2019)

Similarly, journalist Azad Essa's (2019) piece "Hamza Yusuf and the Struggle for the Soul of Western Islam" also offers initial praise before noting perplexedly: "The man who once suggested Muslims were wary of any scholar too close to the government is now working with Trump, and seen by some as an Emirati stooge." Additionally,

Daniel Haqiqatjou (2019) begins his critique by prefacing his empathy with Hanson's supporters: "I get it. I used to defend Sh Hamza Yusuf for certain things as well....When there is a repeated pattern of statements and associations, we are left no choice but to revisit prior assumptions.''

Close analysis of this set of articles suggests that it is unlike categories 1, 2 and 3, in that minimal treatment is allocated to addressing the human rights agenda on the commission's terms as evidenced by scarce referencing to any publications of its commissioners, the open commission meetings, agendas, minutes, or the charter itself, seemingly affirming the hypothesis of balkanization through the formation of filter bubbles. However, it is similar to the bulk of criticism in that the pieces largely avoid using the truth claims of Islam or its concomitant scripture to establish or refute points. The issues rest squarely on political assumptions. Criticisms of Hanson voiced by prominent North American Muslim professors Mohammad Fadel, Jonathan A. C. Brown, and Joseph Lumbard, as well as censure coming from religious scholars such as Suhaib Webb and Shadee ElMasri, therefore, stand out as outliers in their select use of religious justifications in comparison to the data set. Despite the outliers, the dialogue between critics and supporters largely remains fixated on the optics of what is reduced at times to "joining Trump's human rights panel" (Farooq, 2019). However, resisting the impulse to frame things so simplistically hinges on a level of nuance that perhaps cannot be expected of non-specialists on social media, because while the connection to Trump was technically indirect, since the commission was comprised of civil servants under an independent mandate, thematic discourse markers consistently focus on the fact that it reported to the Department of State, and was led by a member of the Cabinet who was nominated by Trump.

6. Conclusions

This article has tried to note that various factors impact freedom of expression, from racial and ethnic identity markers, to contested chronologies, to ideology and recent information bias, all of which play roles in determining *who* has *what* license. Opinionated people have always met fierce opposition. However, when race and identity politics constitute such aggravating factors in the American Muslim community's critical subconsciousness and its widespread opposition to an administration, a Muslim scholar's identity markers can become over emphasized in public scrutiny. Moreover, within the data corpus some appear merely fixated on settling old scores, while others seem to loathe why a 'cis white man' gets to represent Muslims in circles of power and in dominant culture. Emphasis on such mediocre critiques, however, obfuscates attention away from judicious dialogues that raise legitimate points. In this case, after the publication of successive critical periodicals Hanson's Wikipedia entry was edited to read "controversial American Islamic

scholar." However, when editorially contested by supporters, Wikipedia struggled to substantiate the label, and "controversial" was just as easily edited out ("Hamza Yusuf," n.d.). As a mirror of deconstructionist culture encyclopedias function as commercial artifacts that reflect the pursuit of verifiability over truth as it is socially constructed by perennially changing discourse (Gaitano, 2016). Nevertheless, such dominant markers are still important. While criticism has a place, it often tacitly assumes that the critic knows better, and in such a vituperative climate it may have been more strategic to designate such a high-risk appointment to a Muslim intellectual who was similarly qualified, but not as pivotal to the survival of institutions. Furthermore, while beyond the scope of analysis here, thematic association suggests a wider geopolitical element to this entire episode as evidenced by periodical placement and editorial stances affiliated with UAE rival states such as Qatar (*Al Jazeera*) and Turkey (*TRT* and *Maydan*). Future research should investigate such links, whereas other longitudinal research should investigate whether the professed critical opinions are simply held by a handful of vocal detractors as Hanson contends, or whether they are actually more representative of the broader American Muslim community's sentiments.

Ex-United Kingdom Ambassador to Lebanon Tom Fletcher (2016) argues that it is a mistake for a public person to be absent on platforms like Twitter where one's constituents and critics are framing the debate. As a vocal critic laments, representatively, "this article was sent to Shaykh Hamza for comment at the beginning of this month, but he has not replied" (Al-Azami, 2019). However, 'punching up' genre criticism being on the increase does not necessarily indicate a reasonable expectation that a commentator on metaphysics, for instance, would start appreciating the analyses of pundits and start engaging them within their preferred ideological frameworks, at their preferred venues. Moreover, the sheer number of supportive comments in social media spaces indicates significant support for Hanson abides. Nevertheless, the privation of his personal engagement on critical platforms translates into a silence thereby interpreted by critics as elitism and tone-deafness. However, the newfound visceral impertinence that characterizes criticism of communal elders heavily factors in to why many simply retreat from spaces where opposing opinions are unwelcomed, substantiating the hypothesis that online factions appear to be further balkanizing (Hampton, 2014).

To the extent that a researcher can minimize the speculative nature of understanding a person's rationale or philosophy by gleaning it from uncatalogued public statements, there is a wider context for questioning social media engagement besides the time it demands. For instance, Shoshana Zuboff's (2019) indictment of surveillance capitalism gives us pause about accepting the arrangements society has with its social media overlords. Authoritarian countries like China, acknowledging the

power of these platforms and their impacts on expression, choose to bring them under the nexus of the state, while liberal democracies like the United States still allow private citizens in Silicon Valley to amass and wield their controlling power. In fact, in early July 2019, Hanson told Malaysian media figure Sharaad Kuttan (2019) he would advise China if given the chance specifically because of their abuse of religious minorities like the Uighurs. There are also indications that Hanson has acknowledged that internal clip curation and administrator-run social media accounts must be institutional priorities. There was a recorded public exchange at Zaytuna College in August of 2019 in which Hanson elaborated to a panel why it was good to have a Muslim voice in the (commission) room for "countervailence" considering "the wretched track record" of the Trump administration, adding more insight to his approach, although video of the dialogue was not published until October 27, 2019, by which time the public relations sequence initiated by his adversaries had already taken effect (Yusuf, 2019). In conclusion, as the community balkanizes, the best strategy for symmetrically engaging governments and critics remains an open question. This brief analysis ends, therefore, by recommending further exploration of the synergizing epistemic intersection between progressive intersectional discourses, Arab media, and political Islamist discourses, which have conventionally been at odds, and now appear to be coalescing on selective consensus building and cancellation.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

5PillarsUK. [5PillarsUK]. (2018, December 7). The prominent American scholar, Shaykh.

@Hamza Yusuf, described the United Arab Emirates as a "country committed to tolerance" [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/5pillarsuk/status/1070820373678186497?lang=en

Abdo, G. (2007). *Mecca and main street*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Al-Azami, U. (2019, September 15). Shaykh Hamza Yusuf and the question of rebellion in the Islamic tradition. *Muslim Matters*. Retrieved from https://muslimmatters.org/2019/09/15/shaykh-hamza-yusuf-and-the-question-of-rebellion-in-the-islamic-tradition

Anjum, O. [Ovamir Anjum]. (2019, September 11). Twenty years ago when I first met HY. [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10109775514103257&id=8642218

Beydoun, K. (2019, July 22). For American Muslims, Hamza Yusuf's endorsement of Trump is one step too far. *Al Araby*. Retrieved from https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/Comment/2019/7/22/Hamza-Yusufs-endorsement-of-Trump-a-step-too-far

Borchers, C. (2015, December 7). Here are those Muslim 'sports heroes' President Obama is talking about. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/07/here-are-those-muslim-american-sports-heroes-president-obama-is-talking-about

Bulliet, R. (2004). *The case for Islamo-Christian civilization*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Chopra, G. (Director). (2018). *Shut up and dribble* [Motion Picture]. USA: Showtime.

Daniels, T. P. (2019). Blackamerican Muslim scholars and leaders in New York City: Sidelining Islamophobia and misrepresentations. *American Journal of Islamic Sciences*, *36*(4), 61–88.

Essa, A. (2019, August 8). Hamza Yusuf and the struggle for the soul of western Islam. *Middle East Eye*. Retrieved from https://www.middleeasteye.net/big-story/hamza-yusuf-and-struggle-soul-western-islam

Farooq, U. (2019, July 9). US Muslim scholar joins Trump's human rights panel. *AA*. Retrieved from https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/us-muslim-scholar-joins-trumps-human-rights-panel/1527283

Fish, S. (2001). *How Milton works*. Boston, MA: Belknap Press.

Fletcher, T. (2016). *The naked diplomat: Power and statecraft in the digital age*. London: William Collins.

Gaitano, N. (2016). Is Wikipedia the new encyclopedia of post-modern times? *Church, Communication and Culture*, *1*(1), 166–168.

George, R. P. (2019, October 4). Muslims and Christians must unite against hate. *America Magazine*. Retrieved from https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/10/04/muslims-and-christians-must-unite-against-hate

Green, E. (2017, March 11). Muslim Americans are united by Trump and divided by race. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/03/muslim-americans-race/519282

Grewal, Z. [ZareenaGrewal]. (2019, July 9). If you are willing to defend Hamza Yusuf's new low, aligning with the Trump administration as an advisor, you're no friend of mine [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ZareenaGrewal/status/1148355398145101824

Hallin, D. C. (1986). *The uncensored war: The Mediai and Vietnam*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Hamad, S. (2019, July 17). Hamza Yusuf is not your friend.

The New Arab. Retrieved from https://www.alaraby. co.uk/english/comment/2019/7/17/hamza-yusuf-is-not-your-friend

Hampton, K. (2014, August 24). Social media and the 'spiral of silence.' *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2014/08/26/social-media-and-the-spiral-of-silence

Hamza Yusuf. (n.d.). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamza_Yusuf

Hanson, H. Y. (2017, September 26). *2017 templeton prize ceremony for Dr. Alvin Plantinga* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOjJ0E_LPcA

Haqiqatjou, D. (2019, September 11). Are supporting and siding with tyrants Halal in Islam, Sh Hamza Yusuf? *Muslim Skeptic*. Retrieved from https://muslimskeptic.com/2019/09/11/are-supporting-and-siding-with-tyrants-halal-in-islam-sh-hamza-yusuf

Hasan, I. (2019, September 3). Dave Chappelle's Sticks & Stones rated low on Rotten Tomatoes. *Newsweek*. Retrieved from https://www.newsweek.com/dave-chappelles-netflix-special-sticks-stones-rated-zero-percent-rotten-tomatoes-1457458

Hibbs, T. S. (2020, February 23). In America, Islamic intellectualism is enjoying a liberal revival. *Dallas News*. Retrieved from https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/02/23/in-america-islamic-intellectualism-is-enjoying-a-liberal-revival

Hilal, M. (2019, July 15). It's time for Muslim Americans to condemn Hamza Yusuf. *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/time-muslim-americans-condemn-hamza-yusuf-190715130254222.html

Holt, K. (2018). Alternative media and the notion of anti-systemness: Towards an analytical framework. *Media and Communication*, *6*(4), 49–57.

Howell, J. (2019, August 3). The lawfare podcast: Mary Ann Glendon on unalienable rights. *Lawfare*. Retrieved from https://www.lawfareblog.com/lawfare-podcast-mary-ann-glendon-unalienable-rights

Jackson, S. (2005). *Islam and the Blackamerican*. Oxford: Oxford.

Jackson, S. (2009). *Islam and the problem with Black suffering*. Oxford: Oxford.

Kaleem, J. (2019, September 22). Why many Muslims treat Bernie Sanders like a rock star. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2019-09-20/bernie-sanders-muslim-voters-2020

Katzman, K. (2019). *The United Arab Emirates: Issues for U.S. policy*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1134191/download

Kuttan, S. (2019, July 1). *Let's talk with Sharaad Kuttan (episode 250)* [Video file] Retrieved from http://www.astroawani.com/video-malaysia/lets-talk-sharaad-kuttan-episode-250-482031

Latif, J. (2018). Muslim American cyber contestations between scholars and activists debating racism, Islamophobia and Black Lives Matter. *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*, *7*(1). https://doi.org/10.1163/25888099-00701005

Lipka, M. (2017). *Muslims and Islam: Key findings in the U.S. and around the world*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

Milani, A. (2014, April 25). Thomas Jefferson was a Muslim. *New Republic*. Retrieved from https://newrepublic.com/article/146350/president-islamophobe

Mindich, D. (2016, July 15). For journalists covering Trump, a Murrow moment. *Columbia Journalism Review*. Retrieved from https://www.cjr.org/analysis/trump_inspires_murrow_moment_for_journalism.php

Mogahed, D., & Chouhoud, Y. (2017). *American Muslim poll 2017: Muslims at the crossroads*. Washington, DC: Institute for Social Policy and Understanding.

Mullan, J. (2001, August 4). Satanic majesties. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/aug/04/classics.highereducation

Pilon, R. (2019, May 31). Natural rights vs. human rights. *Cato Institute*. Retrieved from https://www.cato.org/blog/natural-rights-vs-human-rights-state-departments-new-commission-unalienable-rights

Şekerci, K. G., & Crnkovich, E. (2019). *The Muslim bans*. Washington, DC: The Bridge Initiative.

Shaikh, A. (2019, August 30). Sherman Jackson, CVE, UAE and some questions. *Muslim Matters*. Retrieved from https://muslimmatters.org/2019/08/29/sherman-jackson-cve-uae-and-some-questions

Susskind, Y., & Stern, J. (2019, July 26). Not a straight, white man? U.S. religious conservatives are coming for you. *Ms. Magazine*. Retrieved from https://msmagazine.com/2019/07/26/not-a-straight-white-man-u-s-religious-conservatives-are-coming-for-you

Tollefsen, C. O. (2015, July 14). Gender identity. *The Public Discourse*. Retrieved from https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/07/15308/

Toosi, N. (2019, July 3). Trump's 'natural law' human rights panel readies for launch. *Politico*. Retrieved from https://www.politico.com/story/2019/07/03/human-rights-panel-1398636

Tripp, C. (2006). *Islam and the moral economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Trump, D. (2017). *Executive order protecting the nation from foreign terrorist entry into the United States*. (Executive Order No. 13769). Washington, DC: The White House.

Why American Muslims lean leftwards for 2020. (2019, September 22). *The Economist*. Retrieved from https://www.economist.com/erasmus/2019/09/22/why-american-muslims-lean-leftwards-for-2020

Yusuf, H. (2016a, June 15). Shaykh Hamza Yusuf on gay Muslims: Scholars issue statement. *Seekers Guidance*. Retrieved from https://seekersguidance.org/

articles/prophet-muhammad/orlandostatement-shaykhhamza-gay-muslims

Yusuf, H. (2016b, November 15). We shall overcome. *Sandala*. Retrieved from https://sandala.org/we-shall-overcome

Yusuf, H. (2019, October 15). *Rules of engagement* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkiUXCvClr0&t=4286s

Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism*. New York, NY: PublicAffairs.

About the Author

Jibril Latif is the product of two loving Californians, living in Kuwait. He has backgrounds in athletics, social sciences, and the arts and humanities. He is a contributor to various research and industry projects across the globe.

Article

Free Speech Under Pressure: The Effect of Online Harassment on Literary Writers

Juliane Wegner [1], Elizabeth Prommer [1,*] and Carlos Collado Seidel [2]

[1] Institute for Media Research, University of Rostock, 18055 Rostock, Germany;
E-Mails: juliane.wegner@uni-rostock.de (J.W.), elizabeth.prommer@uni-rostock.de (E.P.)
[2] Department of History and Cultural Studies, Philipps-University Marburg, 35032 Marburg, Germany;
E-Mail: carlos.colladoseidel@staff.uni-marburg.de

* Corresponding author

Abstract
In the perception of writers in Germany, free speech is under strong pressure. A survey study, in which 526 literature writers took part, reveals innumerable aspects of hate speech, online harassment, and even physical assaults. Every second person has already experienced assaults on his or her person and is also aware of attacks on colleagues. Three quarters are concerned about freedom of expression in Germany and complain of an increase in threats, intimidation, and hateful reactions. The research project was developed in collaboration between the Institute for Media Research, University of Rostock, and the PEN Center Germany.

1. Introduction

Not only is free speech an essential requirement for democratic states, it is also a key factor for a diverse and inclusive society. The diversity of ideas and opinions together with public discourse and critical reflection form the basis of democratic societies. This requires the freedom of speech as a central aspect that is anchored in the German constitution (German Basic Law) and constitutions of many other countries as well. This ideal is also grounded through the inclusive function (Beck, 2015, p. 103) of the media. The ideal calls for an open system that represents a plurality of opinions through the media, with the ability to transmit and grant visibility to the entire spectrum and diversity of ideas. Here, the public spheres of the digital realm provide opportunities and ample potential to heighten the visibility of pre-

viously so-called marginalized groups and perspectives (Habermas, 1990). But at the same time we are currently experiencing social movements, in particular in the digital public sphere—Altmeppen et al. (2019, p. 70) call these "competing public arenas"—that seeks to use the discursive space not just to present a contrasting viewpoint, but to spread hate. Digital public spheres play a key role in the emergence of so-called hate speech and shitstorms (cf. Duggan et al., 2014; Leets, 2002; Nolden, 2020; Rieger, Schmitt, & Frischlich, 2018; Springer, 2014).

There is the notion that the spreading of online hate in recent times has become a threat to free speech and open discourses. It has become subject to academic research but also to political interventions. 'Hate on the web' is now met in Germany with new regulations. Several cases concerning politicians receiving hate and defamatory statements have led to the court decisions

and lately to new laws relating to hate speech (Höhne & Reimann, 2019).

The premise for this study is the observation that functional social integration requires both diverse mass media and an open digital social media to provide a space where the different opinions found in society can manifest themselves. This raises the question in what way free speech comes under attack by verbal counter movements manifested in hate comments, shitstorms, and online harassment, since people might refrain from voicing their opinion in fear of such attacks in a poisoned environment. Sponholz remarks: "Hate speech poses a threat through its deteriorating effect on coexistence in modern societies and thus our collective future" (Sponholz, 2018, p. 443).

Unlike many studies (Obermaier, Hofbauer, & Reinemann, 2018; Papendick, Rees, Wäschle, & Zick, 2020), which focus on journalists, we are focusing on literature writers, such as essayists, novelists, or poets, not journalists. Writers of novels, biographies, essays, fiction, or science books are also active participants in the public-digital sphere, as they shape it in complex ways. Literature is dependent on the public sphere and vice versa. The digital media environment and the new modes of communication established by it affect the field of literature. The digital space offers writers a great variety of opportunities "for the production of texts, for the communication with the readers, for the inclusion of people who did not have access to culture before, for the inspiration to new ideas, perhaps even for the exchange…among readers" (Zeh, 2012, p. 3). Literary work thus plays an integral part in the processes of inclusion. This is particularly true for the digital public sphere.

Writers have been subject to online hate and controversial discussion. In Germany, a prominent example is the debate around Peter Handke, winner of the 2019 Nobel Prize for Literature. Austrian author Peter Handke has received his Nobel Prize for Literature in 2019 and the Swedish Academy faced intense criticism for the choice. Peter Handke is accused of supporting the genocidal Serbian regime led by Slobodan Milošević and of denying the extent of Serbian terror and killing during the 1990s in former Yugoslavia. Since the announcement of the prize, international writers and human rights campaigners have called upon the members of the Swedish Academy to change their minds, via online campaigns, twitter storms, and press (cf. Thorpe, 2019). This is an example of the ambivalence encountered in the digital public sphere. It is in this sense that Struth describes the deliberation between freedom of speech and the potential toleration of anti-democratic statements as a "democratic dilemma" (Struth, 2019, p. 37).

Literary authors and writers, unlike journalists, are usually not subject to direct physical attacks, as they happen for instance at demonstrations. However, writers working in Germany have reported encounters with hate speech, harassment, and even physical assaults at lectures, a development which has brought the German writers' union and the German PEN Center to raise the question of how widespread such attacks actually are, in how far they endanger freedom of expression and what their consequences for the work of the writers are. Based on this question, the Institute for Media Research at the University of Rostock and the German PEN Center conducted an online survey study (2018). The initial goal was to evaluate the type and frequency of attacks on writers with a focus on digital public spheres, as well as the evaluation of potential effects on the persons affected. Do offline or online attacks lead to a form of self-censorship and thus endanger the visibility of perspectives and opinions? The German PEN Center has established itself as an advocate of free speech and is regarded as a strong voice of persecuted and oppressed writers (cf. German PEN Center, n.d.).

The German PEN Center is the national affiliation of PEN International, an international institution to promote freedom of expression since the early 1920s. PEN is an acronym of Poets, Essayists, Novelists. Their principles are:

> PEN stands for the principle of unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations, and members pledge themselves to oppose any form of suppression of freedom of expression in the country and community to which they belong, as well as throughout the world wherever this is possible. PEN declares for a free press and opposes arbitrary censorship in time of peace. (PEN International, n.d.)

In Germany, the PEN Center has about 800 members. To become a member, one needs to be introduced by two PEN members and all members decide upon membership. Membership goes to literary authors (Poets, Essayists, Novelists) who have reached "special literary achievements;" this usually includes having their books published with well-known and respected publishing companies. Journalists, bloggers, and academics are usually not members. On the other hand, this does not exclude that PEN members will write essays or commentaries that are published in newspapers.

This study sheds a light on literary writers as a rarely investigated group in this context. It pursues the question whether professional self-limitation—or self-censorship in the most extreme case—are currently evident in Germany and which forms they take.

2. Literature Review

Research has centred mainly on journalists, intersectional relations, the form of the assaults, and the effect online attacks have, but rarely have dealt with literary authors. Recent international comparative studies have shown that attacks on journalists are on the rise. A high number of "physical assaults, threats and intimidations" (Reporters Without Borders Germany, 2018, p. 1) have been reported. It is debated if this leads the way to

self-censorship once writers start reconsidering whether they should research and work on a certain issue that could provoke harassment (Binns, 2017; Löfgren Nilsson, & Örnebring, 2016).

Preuß, Tetzlaff, and Zick (2017) and the European Center for Press and Media Freedom have studied experiences of harassment. The key results show that almost half (42%) of the 780 responding journalists had experienced harassment in 2016 and that media outlets, such as newspapers or television, are increasingly affected (Preuß et al., 2017, p. 3). An extra level of danger exists during visits to events organised by or related to the spectrum of the political far-right (Betche & Hoffmann, 2018, p. 11). In summary, one important origin of the hate-speech are right-wing-political groups in Germany (Sorce, 2020). Journalists reporting about right-wing demonstrations have repeatedly been victims of violence or assaults. Even the free media have been denounced as "Lying Press" by representatives of the right-wing party Alternative for Germany (Freedom House, 2017, p. 22). For the definitions of the different right-wing groups in Germany, please see the glossary in the Supplementary File.

Another comparative approach on the international level is used in the study *Journalists under Pressure* (Clark & Grech, 2017) that focuses on the subject of self-censorship. Key takeaways are that half (53%) of the 940 responding journalists from countries across Europe have experienced harassment online (cf. Clark & Grech, 2017, p. 11). In the context of the study, self-censorship is defined very broadly as the consideration whether a journalist is likely to encounter negative effects by looking at a particular issue and in consequence chooses to drop the subject. For 63% of the respondents this was the case: They practised "self-censorship—the control of what one says or does in order to avoid annoying or offending others but without being told officially that such control is necessary" (Clark & Grech, 2017, p. 11).

Research by Obermaier et al. (2018) shows that the clear majority of journalists in Germany (over 70%) are rarely attacked personally but observe attacks on colleagues. Nevertheless, a majority of journalists sees this as a growing problem and assumes that hate speech negatively affects the sentiment towards journalists in society.

Several studies find correlation between gender (Binns, 2017), sexual orientation (Sweeney, 2015), race (Nolden, 2020), and the amount of hate-speech received. An analysis by the newspaper *The Guardian* showed that the 10 people receiving the most negative comments in the online commentary section were eight women and two black men (Gardiner et al., 2016). Eckert (2017) interviewed women who blog about politics or identify themselves as feminists in Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. They face great risks of online abuse. In-depth interviews revealed that 73.4% had negative experiences due to blogging and/or social media use. Most of these negative experiences involved not only abusive comments but also stalking, trolls, rape threats, death threats, and unpleasant offline encounters.

Stahel and Schoen (2019) found out that female journalists are more likely to use avoidance strategies as a reaction to online attacks than male journalists, since the attacks affect and stress them more. Avoidance includes limiting audience engagement, adapting reporting behaviour, and thinking about quitting journalism (Chen et al., 2018).

A study by PEN America found comparable results. According to this study two-thirds of the responding literature writers reported having avoided a controversial issue in the past (PEN America, 2015). A similar study (PEN America, 2017), geared at journalists and writers with experience of harassment, shows the impact such attacks have on the writers and journalists. 67 percent of survey respondents reported having a severe reaction to their online harassment, including: fearing for their safety or the safety of their beloved ones; refraining from publishing their work; and/or permanently deleting their social media accounts. Changing social media behaviour or even taking a break is also one of the reactions.

Besides all benefits, online media also offer a space in which online hate (i.e., cyberhate, hate speech, and extremism) flourishes. The content of online harassment has been studied extensively, often in the context of mobbing and more recently with a focus on hate speech. Forms of online harassment in the German-speaking area are often aligned in research in three central negative internet phenomena (Amadeu-Antonio-Stiftung, 2016; Prinzing, 2015): flaming (pure insult), hate speech (discrimination), and shitstorms. According to Meibauer, hate speech in general is "the verbal expression of hatred against persons or groups of people" (Meibauer, 2013, p. 1). Key influence factors for negative communication online are anonymity and the lack of identifiability of the authors. Opinions are presented or formulated in a drastic manner, which would never be employed in face-to-face communication. At the same time, the risk of encountering aggressive and insulting behaviour increases (cf. Mayer-Uellner, 2003, p. 207; Reid-Steere, 2000, p. 275). Schütte speaks of "performance" in this context, meaning the display of provocative behaviour that aims to generate denunciation or support and to "revel in user reactions" (Schütte, 2013, p. 135). Schmitt puts emphasis on incentives such as distinction, intimidation, dominance, and sovereignty of interpretation, as well as fun and excitement (Schmitt, 2017, pp. 52–55).

Rieger et al. (2018) conceptualize online hate as:

Norm transgressing communication that is (1) characterized by the derogation and defamation of single individuals (offensive speech) as well as members of targeted social groups (hate speech), (2) spread by individual users, social bots, as well as social groups or state actors…(3) motivated by personal, social, as well as ideological factors. (Rieger et al., 2018, p. 461)

The consequences of hate speech in the digital public sphere are manifold. On the audience side, Eckes, Fernholz, Geschke, Klaßen, and Quent (2019) found that one out of two internet users report that in reaction to hate speech they are less inclined to reveal their personal political point of view on the internet (54%), as well as less inclined to participate in debates online (47%). This means "that people are systematically pushed out of online discussions through hate messages.…Not only the affected persons suffer from this, but also online pluralism in general and in consequence the democratic culture of discourse as well" (Geschke, Klaßen, Quent, & Richter, 2019, p. 2).

Obermaier et al. (2018, p. 502) sum up:

Hate speech, especially online hate, directed at journalists might be problematic because it carries the potential of negative effects on journalists themselves and, in turn, on journalistic work (cf. Leets, 2002; Seethaler et al., 2019, p. 246). First, hate speech might impede the ability of journalists to fulfil their duties as it potentially puts them under stark emotional pressure, induces stress and fear, for instance, when they themselves or their families are threatened. Also, this could lead to a reduction in well-being or job satisfaction. Second, hate speech could intimidate journalists to such an extent that they would frame certain topics differently or avoid reporting on certain conflict-prone topics at all. (Obermaier et al., 2018, pp. 502–503)

Hate-speech has manifold effects but is produced only by a small percent of the audience. Springer (2014) studies various newspapers' online comment-sections in her work and highlights that the majority of media users (95%) tend to act passively and neither comment on nor 'like' online texts. Comments are in fact only generated by a small number of people (cf. Springer, 2014). This result is supported by Krone's study of an Austrian daily newspaper (Krone, 2019). A study by Weber, Prochazka, and Schweiger (2015, p. 26) reveals that "rude" user comments have a negative effect on the perception of the quality of a given text and make media outlets appear untrustworthy.

Summarising the state of research, it shows that empirical studies with a particular focus on writers in Germany are scarce. This study should fill this gap. The focus is on the form and scope of negative experiences, as well as on the consequences they have for the literary work.

3. Method and Respondents

In line with the literature review, our guiding questions are: Do literary writers have personal experience with hate speech, online harassment, shitstorms, or other forms of assault? Which issues are likely to stimulate harassment? How does this show up in their work? Does this lead to self-censorship? To answer these questions, we conducted a standardised online survey among authors and writers with open and closed questions addressing these topics. The online questionnaire was developed together with the German PEN Centre adjusting questions of journalistic surveys (such as Preuß et al., 2017, or Reporters Without Borders Germany, 2018) to literary authors and adding themes.

The link to the online questionnaire was distributed by email among all German PEN members, about 800 people in June 2018. We also tried to distribute the questionnaire via the writer's unions (e.g., regional associations of the German writers' union) a week later. Nevertheless, the return rate and dates show that the respondents mainly consist of the PEN membership. The design of the survey prevented repeated participation by logging IP addresses. The return shows that 526 persons answered the questionnaire.

On the basis of the online survey of these 526 responding writers, we can assess the writers' personal views regarding freedom of expression and their individual experiences of online harassment and shitstorms. Furthermore, the survey inquired about changes of behaviour and self-limitation.

Of the questioned writers, the participation of women and men is balanced, with 51% identifying themselves as women and 48.4% as men, with three people (0.6%) identifying as a non-binary gender. Their level of education is above the German average (72% hold a university degree) and they are mostly over 50 years of age: 69% are above that age. Women are on average about eight years younger than men. Official governmental data in Germany does not collect information about ethnicity or race but the so called 'migration background.' A person with 'migration background' either does not hold the German nationality, was born outside of Germany, or rather one of their parents was born outside of Germany. According to official government data, 25% of the population living in Germany has this migration background (Destatis, 2020). The vast majority of our respondents has no personal or family background of immigration (85%), which is less than the German average (cf. Table 1).

We cannot state whether our respondents reflect the sociodemographic of the PEN membership since there is no data collection at PEN available, which would allow us to compare the respondents with the membership. But since, to become member, one needs to have achieved relevant merits in the literary world, it can be assumed that the PEN membership is older, with high levels of education. We assume that our return on female authors is higher than in the PEN membership.

Since most authors work for different outlets, we asked what their different outlets are and what their primary working income is. Almost all of the respondents consider themselves as writers (92%), the other eight percent see themselves as journalists, translators, or publishers. Asked where the primary income stems

Table 1. Respondents.

	Number of respondents (n = 526)	Percentage
Gender		
Women	260	51%
Man	247	48.4%
Non-binary	3	0.6%
All respondents (n = 16 chose not to answer)	510	100%
Age		
Under 39 yrs.	49	9.9%
40 to 49 yrs.	84	17%
50 to 59 yrs.	151	30.5%
Above 60 yrs.	211	42.6%
All respondents (n = 31 chose not to answer)	495	100%
Migration background		
No migration background	426	84.7%
With migration background	77	15.3%
All respondents (n = 23 chose not to answer)	503	100%
Main profession/income		
Author/writer/poet, essayist, novelist	369	72%
Journalist	32	6%
Script author	7	1%
Editor	22	4%
Translator	23	5%
Other (lecturer, blogger, publisher…)	57	11%
All respondents (n = 16 chose not to answer)	510	100%

Source: Author.

from, three quarters of respondents (72%) work primarily as poets, essayists, and novelists, which we summarize as writers/authors. Other primary activities are journalism (6%) and translating (5%). The others work for publishing companies as editors or script authors.

The respondents write mostly fiction (66%), such as crime novels (34%) or children's books (19%). The literary work of the respondents aims at presenting the aesthetics of language (55%) and wants to stimulate an emotional reaction in the reader (50%). At the same time, they seek to entertain (48%), formulate critique (42%), and represent reality (40%). Furthermore, the respondents strive for artistic expression (38%).

In relation to the internet and their everyday professional life, they report primarily to use online search engines (93%), but also social networks, in particular Facebook (64%).

The open questions with free text fields were answered comprehensively and in detail. This shows that the issue is seen as important for the writers. We have conducted an extra content analysis to summarize these full text answers in detail, since they deliver the qualitative interpretation of our quantitative measurements. The high number of respondents in comparison with the totality of the PEN memberships indicates, as well, that the questions raised were considered as being of outstanding relevance.

4. Results

4.1. Threats to Free Speech and Experiences of Harassment

The survey began with the assessment of the general situation of free speech and possible threats to it in Germany. More than three quarters (78%) of the respondents voiced concern about the current state of free speech in Germany, and a third of these respondents even saw free speech highly endangered (34%). One of the key questions was the personal experience with attacks, harassment, or hate speech. We asked: "Have you experienced in your professional or private life harassment, insults, or attacks?" In the following, we will use harassment, attacks, and assault as synonyms. Concerning this point, half of the respondents (52%; n = 273) reported having experienced themselves different forms of harassment and attacks. The following presentation of the results will apply to the authors with assault experience or, when noted, compare the authors with such experiences with all respondents. Those who experienced assaults faced them mainly online (69%; cf. Table 2) or verbally face-to-face (57%). Only three percent of these assaults were of physical violence. A look at the online attacks shows that Facebook (58%), the commentary function of online articles (46%), and personal emails (33%)

Table 2. Respondents with attack experiences.

	Personal experience with attacks		Only those with experience: attacks via internet		Only those with experience: verbal attacks face-to-face	
	cases	(%)	cases	(%)	cases	(%)
Gender						
Woman	131	51%	103	75%	73	53%
Man	140	57%	91	64%	88	62%
All	271	54%	194	69%	161	57%
Migration						
No migration background	222	52%	159	69%	132	58%
With migration background	45	59%	34	71%	26	54%
All	267	53%	193	70%	158	57%
Age						
Up to 39 yrs.	32	65%	30	91%	15	45%
40 to 49 yrs.	49	58%	42	82%	24	47%
50 to 59 yrs.	75	50%	59	77%	42	55%
Over 60 yrs.	105	50%	59	54%	71	65%
All	261	53%	190	70%	152	56%

Source: Author.

are the media through which the online attacks mainly occur. Twitter, although less used by respondents, also plays a role (15%).

According to Chen et al. (2018), Eckert (2017), and Stahel and Schoen (2019) women and people of colour are more likely to receive online harassment. Our study partly confirms these results. Authors with a migration background experience more attacks than authors without (7% above the average). Differing from other findings, our results show that men experience slightly more attacks, but the kind of attack differs by gender. Men experience them significantly more frequently verbally face-to-face, while women mainly online. Additionally, there is an interesting significant age gap: The younger the authors are the more likely they are to experience attacks, mainly via the cyberspace.

Online harassment is more likely to be targeting younger people and people with a migration background. Women are attacked online, while face-to-face verbal attacks affect more men. Looking at the intersectional correlation of the attacks, we can state that older people, regardless of gender and migration background, experience less attacks. Younger men with a migration background experience the highest degree of harassment. For women, the migration status is less relevant.

Half of the respondents (48%) reported being aware of incidents of hate speech, threats, or intimidations directed at colleagues. According to the reported perception of the writers, the negative experiences mentioned here are a new phenomenon. Three in four respondents (70%) hold the impression that incidents of threats, intimidations, and hateful reactions have increased over the last three years.

4.2. Origins and Reasons for Attacks

Verbal as well as online harassment mainly comes from anonymous persons (66%) and from persons who are principally identifiable by name but unknown to the author (35%) or the audience in general (22%). To get more qualitative information we asked with an open-ended question who the perpetrators are. As mentioned above, the writers made extensive use of the free text fields: 124 out of 273 people who had experienced assaults responded. We conducted a content analysis to summarize the answers in groups. According to these answers, every third attacked author believes that the harassment comes from right-wing political groups. They are a major force in cases of harassment. More than a third (34%, n = 42) of the open-ended answers centred on these groups. Mainly, this includes persons from the right-wing political spectrum, such as the "Identitarians," "members of the political party AfD and their supporters," "Reichsbürger, Pegida supporters," "Far-right groups," and "Neo-Nazis" (cf. glossary, in Supplementary File). Very few answers mentioned pressure from the political left.

Besides right-wing groups, public authorities and institutions (n = 20) are mentioned as well. This includes the "police" and the "judiciary" or, as far as the writers' own literary environment (n = 18), the "German writers' union" as well as "writer colleagues." Experiences of harassment or intimidations from the economic sphere ("enterprises," "corporations," "real-estate companies," n = 16) and the media milieu ("media owners," "public broadcasters," "interviewees," n = 14) were also reported, but these did occur rarely.

According to the respondents, the main causes of the various forms of harassment are dissatisfaction with the
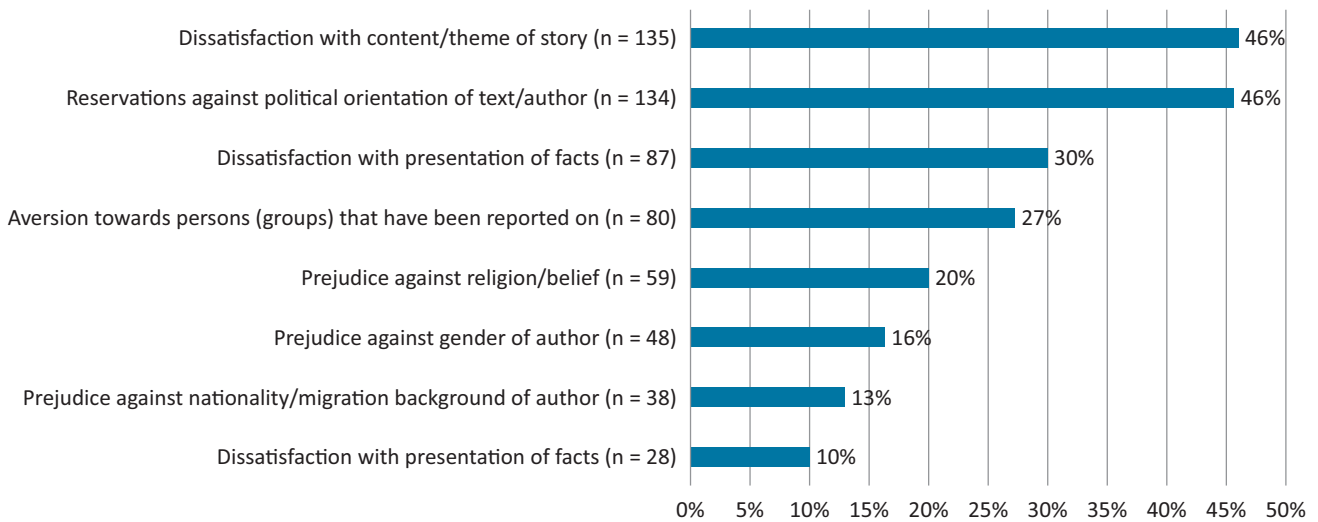
theme of the story and reservations against the assumed political orientation and views of the author. Another reason for assaults is the way the facts are presented (cf. Figure 1). Also relevant, but less mentioned, is prejudice against gender and religion/world view.

Summarizing, a relevant portion of the attacks comes from right-wing political groups voicing their dislike over the themes and contents of the respondent's work.

4.3. Consequences of the Assaults

These attacks have effects on the well-being of the assaulted authors and their professional life and work.

Additionally, these assaults also affect authors without personal experience of attacks, since they have heard or have knowledge of attacks against their colleagues and react accordingly. Among those with personal experience, the attacks have primordially an impact on the emotional well-being (63%); however, more than half of them also feel restricted in their everyday working life (51%). Physical health, financial livelihood, private life, and freedom of movement are in turn less affected. In general, these impairments also apply to those who have no personal experience of attacks, as they also feel that their well-being and their professional life are affected (40%; cf. Table 3).

Cause	Percentage
Dissatisfaction with content/theme of story (n = 135)	46%
Reservations against political orientation of text/author (n = 134)	46%
Dissatisfaction with presentation of facts (n = 87)	30%
Aversion towards persons (groups) that have been reported on (n = 80)	27%
Prejudice against religion/belief (n = 59)	20%
Prejudice against gender of author (n = 48)	16%
Prejudice against nationality/migration background of author (n = 38)	13%
Dissatisfaction with presentation of facts (n = 28)	10%

Figure 1. (Assumed) causes for harassment (n = 273, only respondents with assault experience). Source: Author.

Table 3. Consequences of harassment.

Given answers: yes/no. Multiple answers possible	Respondents with harassment experience (n = 273)	All respondents (n = 526)
Effect on professional work		
I feel encouraged with my work and will not be intimidated	60%	51%
I evaluate events and issues with greater care	23%	22%
I reduce sensitive and critical stories/themes	21%	15%
I write less on controversial subjects	12%	10%
I play down controversial information	11%	8%
I tailor stories to fit the interests of my clients	9%	8%
I stop writing about sensitive and critical stories	3%	2%
I pass that subject over to a colleague	2%	1%
Effect on social media use		
I have reduced or avoided activities in social media	36%	15%
Personal effects		
Effects on my psychological well-being	63%	40%
Effects on my daily work	51%	41%
Effects on my personal life	35%	27%
Effects on my financial existence	32%	27%
Effects on my health	25%	19%
Effects on my mobility	24%	21%

Source: Author.

The attacks also have a direct impact on literary work and everyday working life. One out of four of the authors who have experienced attacks (23%) has become more cautious in the assessment of facts. One in five (21%) writes less about sensitive topics, and one in eight (12%) writes less about controversial subjects.

However, the number of those who have completely given up dealing with a topic due to concerns about attacks (3%) or have passed it to a colleague (2%) is marginal.

The attacks also show effects on the use of social media. Four out of ten respondents have changed their behaviour in online communication and research. A third of the respondents with negative experiences (36%) in-dicate that they have reduced or avoided social media activities in recent years. In this context, no differences can be stated in view of gender or migration background.

This self-restraint contrasts with an opposite trend: Six out of ten authors affected by attacks (60%) work more encouraged, with greater self-confidence and con-sider that their work is now more important than ever. This tendency is also evident among those who have had no experience of attacks. Most of them refuse to be stopped or intimidated by threats.

In the commentary sections of the open answers, three quarters of all respondents mention worries or po-tential changes regarding their professional behaviour (75%; cf. Table 4). The fears mentioned apply more to lit-

Table 4. Potential threats to the profession (open answers with examples of quotes).

Threats	Examples of quotes/translated from German
1. Adapted writing/self-limitation/self-censorship (18%, n = 69)	That artists/writers are discouraged from their work by the threat of harassment or controversies, or as they eschew topics as an act of prophylactic self-censorship;
	You should not censor yourself;
	That an inner censorship kicks in and prohibits you to write what urgently needs to be said, leading in consequence to a distorted public image of an issue.
2. Loss of quality (13%, n = 50)	Increasing loss of quality in general;
	Pressure from clients;
	Fake news prevails against facts;
	Diminished funding for quality journalism.
3. Assaults, harassment and stalking/mobbing (12%, n = 48)	Infiltration of governmental agencies by far-right radicals, insufficient law enforcement and prosecution of criminal activity, threats and intimidation by intolerant agents;
	The anonymity of threats, enabled and supported/protected by "social media";
	Threats, verbal abuse by right-wing groups;
	The paring down of ethical norms, verbal assault and abuse, intentional misinterpretation, the decline of inhibition threshold to resort to violence and hate;
	That I don't want to work in my profession anymore, because the mental strain is becoming too hard.
4. Degradation of literary culture/the audience (10%, n = 38)	It is made difficult for writers to build up an audience online;
	Bloggers are no longer allowed to post their reviews without marking them as advertisements. The chance to develop an audience is decreased for unestablished authors;
	The ultimate demise of the public acknowledgment of literary quality;
	That a shrinking number of readers has an interest in complex topics;
	The variety of literature is set to decrease even further, because big publishing houses are only pushing mainstream literature. So, if you are working in a niche field, you need to go to the smaller publishing houses, which means in turn that you are not able to reach the broad public.
5. Threat to free speech (5%, n = 21)	Threats, abuse by right-wing groups, persons. A general neglect of literature, art. Limitation of freedom of expression and certain topics;
	That hate mails etc. pose a threat to free speech, because they aim at silencing people;
	A culture of debate is curtailed, the tone becomes more aggressive, knock-out arguments, thwart any discussion.

Source: Author.

erature and free speech in general and less to individual habit changes. This includes in particular self-limitations in writing like self-censorship or self-restrictions (n = 69). As an example: "artists/writers/journalists are discouraged from their work by the threat of harassment or controversies, or as they eschew topics as an act of prophylactic self-censorship."

Many respondents are worried about the potential loss of quality (n = 50): an "increasing loss of quality in general" or due to "pressure from clients."

Equally often, assaults, harassment, and stalking/ mobbing (n = 48) are mentioned as elements of danger in view of the "infiltration of governmental agencies by far-right radicals, insufficient law enforcement and prosecution of criminal activity, threats and intimidation by intolerant agents." The degradation of literary culture and the audience (n = 38) can be identified as the fourth most relevant category. This includes the following statements: "the ultimate demise of the public acknowledgment of the quality of literature" or the observation "that a shrinking number of readers has an interest in complex topics." The threat to free speech (n = 21) is perceived clearly by the writers. They are afraid of "threats, abuse by right-wing groups," the "general neglect of literature, [and] art" as well as the constraints on free speech and the debate of controversial issues.

In the second part of the section we asked: "What do you see as a (future) challenge in your profession?" The respondents mention raising awareness and maintenance of a critical attitude (n = 44): "To raise awareness, to speak out against idiots, against sexism, racism, against social change for the negative. Counter agitation with facts."

A further aspect is "clean" and fact-based writing (n = 35): "The challenge: to inform oneself as comprehensively as possible, in the best case to learn about all the facets of an 'issue' in order to make your own judgement" and to "ensure a fair balance within the discourse." Or: "The challenge is and will be to distinguish truth from untruth and to insist on an open, fair dialogue and to defend it." Taking a stand for your own opinion (n = 30) remains crucial. The respondents demand writers to "open your mouth!" and "to have the courage to stand by your own opinion," "not to let hate and adversity refrain oneself from critical subjects. Issues of gender and racism are particularly useful in fantastic literature, but many shy away from the conflict because they are worried about being stigmatized."

5. Conclusions

This study looks at the current state of freedom of expression in a time of shitstorms and online harassment, and of personal attacks on literary writers in Germany. The key question is whether the experience of harassment and assault leads to changes in the professional behaviour and, as the last resort, to self-censorship.

The main results can be summarized as follows: According to their own perception, three quarters of all respondents say that incidents of threats, intimidations, and hateful reactions have been on the rise over the last three years. Half of the respondents have experienced harassment in connection with their own texts. The assaults come in particular from the right-wing or far-right political spectrum. These reports are in accordance with the findings of most of the research that looked at journalism (cf. Betche & Hoffmann, 2018; Binns, 2017; Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016).

In our survey, online harassment targeted more younger people and persons with a migration background. Male authors get attacked slightly more often. This result differs from surveys on journalism (Eckert, 2017). Women are attacked mainly online, while face-to-face verbal attacks especially affect men. Looking at the intersectional correlation of the attacks, we can state that older people, regardless of gender and migration background, experience less attacks. Younger men with a migration background experience the highest degree of harassment. Considering women, the migration status does not matter as much. These results sound conclusive in view of the fact that most of the attacks are driven from right-wing groups for whom the migration status of the author seems to matter more than the gender. This outcome again differs from other findings (Eckert, 2017).

The assaults and a general development in society, perceived by the writers as worrying, not only have consequences for their personal wellbeing, but also for their daily work: Even taking into account that half of the respondents maintain that they act with more self-assurance despite the fear of experiencing harassments, a fifth reports an altered, more careful treatment of issues that could spark controversy. Here, our findings confirm the results of most studies on journalism (Obermaier et al., 2018). It is important to highlight that the respondents of our study are primordially literary writers of fictional essays and novels. They are not involved in the daily routine of a journalistic newsroom, do not attend press conferences or demonstrations for professional reasons, and usually work alone. Nonetheless, the experienced attacks and imagined harassment lead to more careful behaviour.

A tendency to self-censorship can be observed in one out of five authors, if a wide definition is used (Clark & Grech, 2017). These authors are more careful and have changed their working behaviour. Even arguing that this number seems to be low, these missing voices reduce considerably the degree of plurality in society. For most of the respondents, online platforms are not only seen as a potential threat to literary freedom. The personal experiences led to a significantly modified online behaviour. Apart from personal consequences, the withdrawal from the digital public sphere does more than only putting its inclusive function into question. In addition, the risks embedded in online communication and the deliberate obstruction of inclusion through hate speech, shitstorms, and harassment leads to a shift in the perception of social reality.

Hate speech and shitstorms are used consciously to impede others in their exercise of their freedom of expression. As shown, such attacks on the digital communication of writers do have consequences on their literary work and lead to self-limitation. Besides the fact that free speech is under pressure to a much larger degree in other countries around the world, the findings of this study are no less a call to alarm for a society that values freedom of speech as one of the greatest achievements of its democratic constitution.

If public voices are silenced, this can lead to an erosion of democratic structures. Without a pluralism of opinions and debates on the development of society, there is an increasing danger that the legitimacy of our democracy will be undermined slowly but surely, with the consequence of destructive frameworks taking hold.

If the opportunities of the public to participate in democratic discourses are limited by phenomena like harassment and hate, this will influence opinion-making throughout society. Opinions, perspectives, and knowledge run the risk of becoming marginalized and extraneous to decision-making processes.

Abuse and hatred are suffered by those who go public and seek to debate social issues. For many, threats and hatred are something they have to deal with in their everyday lives. Some even must resort to extensive security measures. The hatred can have serious consequences for the lives of individuals, as it can also lead to passivity in word or deed. Self-censorship, resignation, and conformance in view of assault and hate are an issue that has to be taken seriously in a democratic society. Writers have an important function in the democratic discourse. It is to be ensured that their voices remain audible in spite of the challenge arising from the dilemma of the advocacy of freedom of speech as an essential value of plural societies in view of those who make use of it aiming decidedly at averting inclusion and plurality.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

References

Altmeppen, K.-D., Bieber, C., Filipović, A., Heesen, J., Neuberger, C., Röttger, U., . . . Thomas, T. (2019). Öffentlichkeit, Verantwortung und Gemeinwohl im digitalen Zeitalter: Zur Erforschung ethischer Aspekte des Medien- und Öffentlichkeitswandels [Publicity, responsibility and common welfare in the digital age: On the research of ethical aspects of changes in media and public]. *Publizistik*, *4*(1), 59–77.

Amadeu-Antonio-Stiftung. (2016). *"Geh sterben!" Umgang mit Hate Speech und Kommentaren im Internet* ["Go and die!" Dealing with hate speech and comments on the Internet]. Berlin: Amadeu-Antonio-Stiftung. Retrieved from https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/w/files/pdfs/hatespeech.pdf

Beck, K. (2015). *Kommunikationswissenschaft* [Communications science]. (4th ed.). Stuttgart and Konstanz: UTB GmbH and UVK Verlag.

Betche, P., & Hoffmann, M. (2018). *Feindbild "Lügenpresse" III: Schulterschluss der Gewaltbereiten* [Enemy image "Lying press" III: Closing of ranks between those who are ready to use violence]. Leipzig: European Centre for Press & Media Freedom. Retrieved from https://www.ecpmf.eu/archive/files/ffm-germany_2018.pdf

Binns, A. (2017). Fair game? Journalists' experiences of online abuse. *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies*, *6*(2), 183–206.

Chen, G. M., Pain, P., Chen, V. Y., Mekelburg, M., Springer, N., & Troger, F. (2018). 'You really have to have a thick skin': A cross-cultural perspective on how online harassment influences female journalists. *Journalism*, *21*(7), 877–895.

Clark, M., & Grech, A. (2017). *Journalists under pressure: Unwarranted interference, fear and self-censorship in Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Destatis. (2020). *Migration und Integration: Bevölkerung in Privathaushalten nach Migrationshintergrund insgesamt* [Migration and integration: Population in private households according to migration background]. *Destatis (Federal Office of Statistics)*. Retrieved from https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/Tabellen/migrationshintergrund-geschlecht-insgesamt.html;jsessionid=58D76ED97FC09E0DD5E3497ECA0EB49A.internet8711

Duggan, M., Rainie, L., Smith, A., Funk, C., Lenhart, A., & Madden, M. (2014). *Online harassment*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment

Eckert, S. (2017). Fighting for recognition: Online abuse of women bloggers in Germany, Switzerland, the UK and US. *New Media & Society*, *20*(4), 1282–1302.

Eckes, C., Fernholz, T., Geschke, D., Klaßen, A., & Quent, M. (2019). *# Hass im Netz: Der schleichende Angriff auf unsere Demokratie. Eine bundesweite repräsentative Untersuchung* [# Hate on the net: The creeping attack on our democracy—A nationwide representative survey]. Jena: Institut für Demokratie und Zivilgesellschaft. Retrieved from https://blog.campact.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/

Hass_im_Netz-Der-schleichende-Angriff.pdf

Freedom House. (2017). *Freedom of the press 2017*. Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FOTP_2017_booklet_FINAL_April28.pdf

Gardiner, B., Mansfield, M., Anderson, I., Holder, J., Louter, D., & Ulmanu, M. (2016, April 12). The dark side of Guardian comments. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/12/the-dark-side-of-guardian-comments

German PEN Center. (n.d.). *PEN-Charta* [PEN charter]. *German PEN Center*. Retrieved from https://www.pen-deutschland.de/de/pen-zentrum-deutschland/die-charta-des-internationalen-pen

Geschke, D., Klaßen, A., Quent, M., & Richter, C. (2019). *Executive summary # Hass im Netz: Der schleichende Angriff auf unsere Demokratie. Eine bundesweite repräsentative Untersuchung* [Executive summary # Hate on the net: The creeping attack on our democracy—A nationwide representative survey]. Jena: Institut für Demokratie und Zivilgesellschaft (IDZ). Retrieved from https://blog.campact.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Hass_im_Netz_Executive_Summary.pdf

Habermas, J. (1990). *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* [The structural transformation of the public sphere]. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Höhne, V., & Reimann, A. (2019, September 19). Gericht hält Pöbeleien gegen Künast für zulässig [Court considers taunts against Künast permissible]. *SPIEGEL Online*. Retrieved from https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/renate-kuenast-berliner-landgericht-haelt-beschimpfungen-fuer-zulaessig-a-1287592.html

Krone, J. (2019). Mythos Sichtbarkeit des Publikums [The myth of audience visibility]. In J. Krone (Ed.), *Medienwandel kompakt 2017–2019: Schlaglichter der Veränderung in Kommunikation, Medienwirtschaft, Medienpolitik und Medienrecht—Ausgewählte Netzveröffentlichungen* [Media change compact 2017–2019: Highlights of changes in communication, media business, media policy and media law—Selected net publications] (pp. 169–174). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Leets, L. (2002). Experiencing hate speech: Perceptions and responses to anti-Semitism and antigay speech. *Journal of Social Issues*, *58*(2), 341–361.

Löfgren Nilsson, M., & Örnebring, H. (2016). Journalism under threat: Intimidation and harassment of Swedish journalists. *Journalism Practice*, *10*(7), 880–890. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2016.1164614

Mayer-Uellner, R. (2003). *Das Schweigen der Lurker: Politische Partizipation und soziale Kontrolle in Online-Diskussionsforen* [The silence of the lurkers: Political participation and social control in online discussion forums]. Munich: Fischer, Reinhard Verlag.

Meibauer, J. (2013). Hassrede: von der Sprache zur Politik [Hate speech: From language to politics]. In J. Meibauer (Eds.), *Hassrede/Hate Speech: Inter-*

disziplinäre Beiträge zu einer aktuellen Diskussion [Hate speech: Interdisciplinary contributions to a current discussion] (pp. 1–16). Giessen: Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen.

Nolden, M. (2020). Rassismus im Netz [Racism on the Net]. In H. Friese, G. Rebane, M. Nolden, & M. Schreiter (Eds.), *Handbuch Soziale Praktiken und Digitale Alltagswelten* [Manual on social practices and digital daily life] (pp. 351–361). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Obermaier, M., Hofbauer, M., & Reinemann, C. (2018). Journalists as targets of hate speech: How German journalists perceive the consequences for themselves and how they cope with it. *Studies in Communication and Media*, *7*(4), 499–524.

Papendick, M., Rees, Y. P. M., Wäschle, F., & Zick, A. (2020). *Hass und Angriffe auf Medienschaffende: Eine Studie zur Wahrnehmung von und Erfahrungen mit Angriffen auf Journalist*innen* [Hate and attacks on media workers: A study on the perception of and experience with attacks on journalists]. Bielefeld: Institut für interdisziplinäre Konflikt- und Gewaltforschung. Retrieved from https://mediendienst-integration.de/fileadmin/Dateien/Studie_Hass_und_Angriffe_auf_Medienschaffende.pdf

PEN America. (2015). Global chilling: The impact of mass surveillance on international writers. *PEN America*. Retrieved from https://pen.org/research-resources/global-chilling

PEN America. (2017). Online harassment survey: Key findings. *PEN America*. Retrieved from https://pen.org/online-harassment-survey-key-findings

PEN International. (n.d.). *The PEN Charter*: *PEN International*. Retrieved from https://pen-international.org/who-we-are/the-pen-charter

Preuß, M., Tetzlaff, F., & Zick, A. (2017). *Hass im Arbeitsalltag Medienschaffender: "Publizieren wird zur Mutprobe." Studie zur Wahrnehmung von und Erfahrungen mit Angriffen unter Journalist_innen* [Hate in the everyday work of media workers: "Publishing is a test of courage." Study on the perception of and experience with attacks on journalists]. Berlin: Mediendienst Integration.

Prinzing, M. (2015). Shitstorms: Nur Wutstürme oder begründete demokratische Proteste? [Shitstorms: Just storms of anger or justified democratic protest?]. In K. Imhof, R. Blum, H. Bonfadelli, O. Jarren, & V. Wyss (Eds.), *Demokratisierung durch Social Media?* [Democratization through social media?] (pp. 153–176). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Reid-Steere, E. (2000). Das Selbst und das Internet: Wandlungen der Illusion von einem Selbst [The self and the Internet: Changes in the illusion of one's self]. In U. Thiedeke (Eds.), *Virtuelle Gruppen: Charakteristika und Problemdimensionen* [Virtual groups: Characteristics and problem dimensions] (pp. 265–283). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Reporters Without Borders Germany. (2018). *Rangliste der Pressefreiheit 2018: Nahaufnahme Deutschland*

[Ranking list of press freedom 2018: Close-up of Germany]. Berlin: Reporters Without Borders Germany. Retrieved from https://www.reporter-ohne-grenzen.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Downloads/Ranglisten/Rangliste_2018/Nahaufnahme_Deutschland_2018_-_Reporter_ohne_Grenzen.pdf

Rieger, D., Schmitt, J. B., & Frischlich, L. (2018). Hate and counter-voices in the Internet: Introduction to the special issue. *Studies in Communication and Media*, *7*(4), 459–472.

Schmitt, J. B. (2017). Online Hate Speech: Definition und Verbreitungsmotivationen aus psychologischer Perspektive [Online hate speech: Definition and motivations for spreading from a psychological perspective]. In K. Kaspar, L. Gräßer, & A. Riffi (Eds.), *Online Hate Speech: Perspektiven auf eine neue Form des Hasses* [Online hate speech: Perspectives on a new form of hate] (pp. 51–56). Munich and Düsseldorf: kopaed Verlag.

Schütte, C. (2013). Zur Funktion von Hass-Zuschreibungen in Online-Diskussionen: Argumentationsstrategien auf islamkritischen Websites [On the function of hate attributions in online discussions: Argumentation strategies on Islam-critical websites]. In J. Meibauer (Ed.), *Hassrede/Hate Speech: Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zu einer aktuellen Diskussion* [Hate speech: Interdisciplinary contributions to a current discussion] (pp. 121–142). Giessen: Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen.

Seethaler, J., Hanitzsch, T., Keel, G., Lauerer, C., Steindl, N., & Wyss, V. (2019). Zwischen Kontinuität und Wandel: Journalismus in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz [Between continuity and change: Journalism in Germany, Austria and Switzerland]. In T. Hanitzsch, J. Seethaler, V. Wyss (Eds.), *Journalismus in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz* [Journalism in Germany, Austria and Switzerland] (pp. 237–256). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Sorce, G. (2020). Journalist-activist boundary work in populist times: The #NazisRaus debate in German media. *Journalism Practice*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1755885

Sponholz, L. (2018). *Hate Speech in den Massenmedien:*

Theoretische Grundlagen und empirische Umsetzung [Hate speech in mass media: Theoretical foundations and empirical implementation]. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Springer, N. (2014). Beschmutzte Öffentlichkeit? Warum Menschen die Kommentarfunktion auf Online-Nachrichtenseiten als öffentliche Toilettenwand benutzen, warum Besucher ihre Hinterlassenschaften trotzdem lesen, und wie die Wände im Anschluss aussehen [Stained public sphere? Why people use the commentary features on online news sites as a public restroom wall, why visitors read their legacies nonetheless, and how the walls look like afterwards]. Münster: LIT Verlag.

Stahel, L., & Schoen, C. (2019). Female journalists under attack? Explaining gender differences in reactions to audiences' attacks. *New Media & Society*, *22*(10), 1849–1867.

Struth, A. K. (2019). *Hassrede und Freiheit der Meinungsäußerung* [Hate speech and freedom of expression]. Berlin and Heidelberg: VS Verlag.

Sweeney, M. S. (2015, August 13). How women journalists can protect themselves online. *Columbia Journalism Review*. Retrieved from http://www.cjr.org/q_and_a/how_women_journalists_can_protect_themselves_online.php

Thorpe, V. (2019, December 7). Nobel winner Peter Handke avoids genocide controversy in speech. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/dec/07/nobel-winner-handke-avoids-genocide-controversy-in-speech

Weber, P., Prochazka, F., & Schweiger, W. (2015). *Was bewirken die Trolle? Ausstrahlungseffekte von Nutzerkommentaren auf die wahrgenommene journalistische Qualität von Nachrichtenbeiträgen* [Which effects do trolls have? Spillover of user comments on the perceived journalistic quality of news articles]. Paper presented at the 60th German Communication Association annual conference, Darmstadt, Germany.

Zeh, J. (2012). Digitale Revolution. Wie wollen wir lesen? [Digital revolution. How do we want to read?]. *ZEIT Online*. Retrieved from https://www.zeit.de/2012/47/Buecher-Internet-Literatur-Verleger/seite-3

About the Authors

Juliane Wegner (MA) is a PhD Student in political communication and Research Associate of the Institute for Media Research at the University of Rostock, Germany. Her research and teaching interests include (online) communication and media—especially self-presentation on social media platforms. Research activities in particular focus on content, distribution, and impact of hate speech as well as (right-wing) propaganda.

Elizabeth Prommer is Professor and Chair for Communication and Media Studies and Director of the Institute for Media Research at the University of Rostock, Germany. Her research focusses on all media platforms (cinema, TV, internet, mobile media, and future new forms) and the changing audiences and production structures in converging media environments. She has led the project "Mediated Time" funded by the German research foundation (DFG). Several of her studies document the underrepresentation of women in media production and representation.

Carlos Collado Seidel is Professor for contemporary history at the University of Marburg, Germany. His main research areas are dictatorial regimes and nationalism in the 20th and 21st centuries. He has been Secretary General of the German PEN, a writers' association committed to the defence of freedom of expression at a national and international level. His principal fields of involvement are the achievement of gender equality and the defence of plurality against growing nationalist intolerance in Western societies.